Black Flag

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ONLINE STITCH-UP

How the Digital Economy Bill closes out freedom of information, protects cartels and turns kids into criminals

ROLLING DECADES

Also inside: We do the roundup for a big year of anniversaries...

Poll Tax: 20 years

Britannica's century

Black Flag: Life at 40

PLUS Healthcare, voting, reviews...

Editorial

This is a year of anniversaries. It is 40 years since Black Flag first came out and to commemorate this we have an interview with one of its founders, Stuart Christie.

This issue also marks the 100th anniversary of Kropotkin's entry on anarchism for the Encyclopaedia Britannica with a discussion of this classic introduction and summary of our ideas and movement. We also celebrate the 1990 poll-tax riot.

Being an election year, we go over the arguments for abstentionism but with a twist, discussing Marxists who came to the same conclusions as libertarians like Guy Aldred did decades previously. Better late than never!

That old politician chestnut of health care is also highlighted, with a discussion of libertarian alternatives to nationalisation as well as how to fight creeping privatisation within the NHS.

With all the flag-waving produced by the election, the Anarchist Federation's piece of the evils of nationalism is timely.

On a sadder note, we include tributes to both anarchist theoretician Colin Ward and radical historian Howard Zinn.

Both contributed immensely to the development of libertarian ideas in the second half of the 20th century and both will be sadly missed.

We also lost former Freedom editor, grand chess master and poet John Rety, someone whom comrades in London will remember fondly.

We hope that our magazine can help develop and apply the ideas they so ably advocated on an ever widening scale!

It is also 170 years since Proudhon proclaimed himself an anarchist in "What is Property?" and changed radical politics forever. More on that next issue.

Finally, we should stress that we will definitely not be taking advantage of the disgraceful Digital Economy Bill – we put our back issues online!

Check out libcom.org/tags/black-flag for the full back catalogue of recent issues, and if you fancy donating or getting hold of a hardcopy, get in touch via the details on page three.

Hunkering down: Sensing trying times ahead, the Black Flag ladybird is getting ready to defend itself. Picture: Anya Brennan.

Black Flag
JOIN THE COLLECTIVE

Since relaunching over the last three years this magazine has been gaining in recognition and has become one of the best places for serious anarchist writing in Britain today. Now we want to expand. We want you to help us reach out into the wider left and beyond. We're looking for marketers, distributors, designers, writers, commissioning editors and photographers to force our theories into the public domain. Contact us at the email or snail mail address opposite.

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Ethos

Black Flag is for a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation – against state control and all forms of government and economic repression. To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.
The Black Flag has been a worldwide symbol for anarchism since the 1880s. It is at base a representative of the negation of all oppressive structures.

About

Contributors/excerpts:
Donnacha DeLong
Ade Dimmick
Stuart Christie
Rob Ray
Iain McKay
Anarchist Federation
Colin Ward
Alan Woodward
Liz Willis
Raz Chaoten
Zida Vodovnik
Howard Zinn
Paul Petard

Layout/design
Rob Ray

Printing
Clydeside Press,
Scotland
☎ 0141-552 5519

Contact/Subs

blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk
Black Flag
BM Hurricane,
London,
WC1N 3XX

Bulk Orders from AK Press

AK Press (UK)
PO Box 12766
Edinburgh
EH8
☎ 0131 555 5165

AK Press (USA)
PO Box 40862
San Francisco CA
☎ 94140-0682
ak@akpress.org

A law made of

Reportage: Donnacha DeLong looks into the unworkable and repressive Digital Economy Bill

The passing into law of the Digital Economy Bill (DEB) was one of the most watched ever, with the online feed to parliament attracting more people for the debate and vote than at any other time bar Prime Minister's Questions.

For Britain's online generation the experience showed exactly how useless representative democracy really is.

The Bill, hyped as forming the basis of the UK's digital future, contained within it some hugely controversial and repressive measures.

Yet, at the final stage, it was passed through a pitifully empty House of Commons as the majority of MPs took to the campaign trail – preferring to defend their seats over defending democracy.

Tellingly, a large number of them suddenly appeared for the vote to do what they were told without having bothered to take part in the debate.

The Bill's final stage fell into the "wash-up" period, in which parliament rushes through leftover bits of legislation before it is dissolved for the election. This is a period where debate is limited and parties do backroom deals to reach consensus.

It's usually a period where relatively unimportant or uncontentious bits and pieces are cleared off the decks before the new regime takes over.

This year, however, things were different.

The wash-up saw the much-hyped drug mephedrone banned, financial "vulture" funds restrained and most controversially of all, the DEB rushed through.

In the period before the debate, campaigning website 38 Degrees joined with the Open Rights Group and helped 20,000 people send emails to their MP calling for a proper debate. With only a few honourable exceptions, MPs of all three major parties ignored their calls and carried on regardless.

The Bill itself contains two seriously dangerous and counter-productive proposals.

A weapon against exposure

The DEB grants powers to the government to force ISPs to block websites or services that a court rules is either distributing or helping to illegally distribute copyrighted material.

Critical: Tom Watson mounted a devastating critique of the Bill during a poorly attended debate but saw his amendments struck down as fellow MPs filed in solely to vote with the whip

The official target for this is sites like the Piratebay which enable filesharing of everything from books to films to games and applications.

However the Bill is written in such a way that many have argued it could also impact on search engines, sites based on user-generated content and free wi-fi providers.

Regardless of the wording, it's very unlikely the government would agree to block the likes of Google. However for investigative websites the outcome is likely to be very different.

Wikileaks is a website devoted exclusively to publishing leaked material "owned" by someone else, specifically the companies and states it is exposing.

It seriously pisses off governments, recently being condemned as a threat to the US army and national security after it leaked chilling footage of US soldiers gunning down Iraqi civilians and journalists, laughing as the bodies were driven over by their comrades on the ground.

Under the Bill, publication of such outrages will leave Wikipedia open to designation as a pirate site for breaking copyright because it is using content claimed as US government property – thus putting anyone who downloaded its content at risk of being disconnected.

This would seem to be semantics – after all newspapers have published leaked content for years.

But it comes alongside a continuous stream of attacks which have already been directed at online activist newsgroup Indymedia in the UK, which has seen its servers seized, warnings placed on connections to its website and numerous legal threats.

Indymedia is only one of hundreds of sites which have been on the receiving end of such tactics. Is there any doubt that, once the law is in place, some bright spark is going to try to shut down, or at the very least, block the likes of Wikileaks?

Counterproductive cartel practices

Internet Service Providers are being told to cut off or restrict the broadband access of unrepentant downloaders of copyrighted material without permission. The ones they call pirates – which used to mean robbing people on the high seas, but has since been redefined to mean downloading the latest Black Eyed Peas album.

This neat bit of repression emerged just days after Peter Mandelson, whose department drew up the Digital Economy Bill, dined with media mogul and critic of file-sharing David Geffen. A coincidence?

The measures have been supported by major figures in the slow-moving, monopolistic media business – the same people who failed to see mp3s coming and refused for years to change their business practices in light of technological change.

These are the people who drove punters to Napster (the first major file sharing site) ten years ago by refusing to provide any legal way to download music.

What makes the measure so idiotic is that it is counter-productive even in terms of the moguls' own businesses.

fear and greed

There is another name that could be used for pirates – fans.

People who download music tend to be the people who like it – the ones who buy concert tickets, buy merchandise and, as it happens, buy music. A survey carried out for the Demos think-tank last year found that the people who most often downloaded music illegally were also the ones who spent the most money on it.

The reality is that this Bill is protectionism at its most backwards and repressive. People download things for a lot of different reasons. For many, it's try before they buy – if they like it, they'll pay for it. For others, it's like a library – they wouldn't have bought it anyway.

The claims of lost millions by the record companies and others seem to be based on little actual research. Either they think that every download would have been paid for, which is rubbish, or they're simply looking at how much money was spent in the past compared to today. Have they not noticed there's a recession going on?

The reality is that the measure won't work. Anyone with any technological ability will find ways to mask themselves and what they're doing. There will be a couple of token cases involving naive teenagers and they might well fail anyway.

Factfile: File sharing

The DEB has been criticised for hurting only 'internet illiterates' who don't know how to protect their downloading habits, as technologies already exist to minimise or eliminate monitoring.

HOW IT WORKS

- Peer to Peer downloading, also known as filesharing, uses a programme known as a torrent "client", for example uTorrent, to handle the process.
- This client downloads and runs "torrent" files – the tiny packages which tell computers how and where to find other people who are sharing particular files such as say, the Black Eyed Peas album.
- Torrent files can be found on a number of different "tracker" sites, most famously thepiratebay.org – though some of these trackers, such as karagarga.net, are invite-only to encourage "seeding" (the creation and/or maintaining of new shared files).
- Once you've got a clent set up, browse the trackers for what you want, hit the download button and the client will do the rest.

AVOIDING SURVEILLANCE

- Most modern torrent clients have an option to delete trackers' details once the dowload is initiated, relying on alternative methods to continue it. As music companies mostly use trackers to trace downloads, this makes it much more difficult to find people.
- Apparently in uTorrent you'd need to double click on the download, make sure the DHT, Peer Exchange and Local Peer Discovery boxes are ticked, then delete the weblinks.
- As an additional layer of security, secondary programmes such as Peerblock use a list of known "bad" IP addresses connected to media companies which it blocks from seeing the filesharer.
- Finally for pretty much total security, it is possible to buy a Virtual Private Network account such as the one at itshidden.com.

DISCLAIMER: Of course file sharing is a deeply reprehensible act. The above is intended as a warning on what you should definitely not be doing, as it's clearly morally wrong in every way.

Devil in the details

Whatever the detail of the new situation will be, it is likely to be fundamentally unfair – few broadband accounts are held by an individual on their own.

No law that punishes a household for the actions of an individual is likely to last very long, particularly when suburban family X finds that 13-year-old Charlie has had their broadband cut off.

And there was a major irony in the Bill when it was originally put forward. Sitting cosily alongside the measures to protect the copyright of big media companies was a measure that was going to screw photographers out of their personal copyright.

For an individual photographer, the copyright on their work is their livelihood, but the Bill originally contained a measure that would have allowed people to freely use photographs if they couldn't find out who owned the copyright – with very few requirements on them as to how much effort they had to put in finding out.

Professional photographers launched a major campaign against the "orphan works" clause, which would have opened the floodgates for large photo agencies and publishers to effectively steal their work.

That measure was dropped. There is a lesson for others in how their organised collective action changed the big business-friendly aspect of the Bill in at least one aspect.

The life of the Digital Economy Bill is a perfect example of how the current political system doesn't work.

Big business plays the tune, politicians in the main do what they're told by their political masters and not their electorate and repressive measures are preferred to creative solutions.

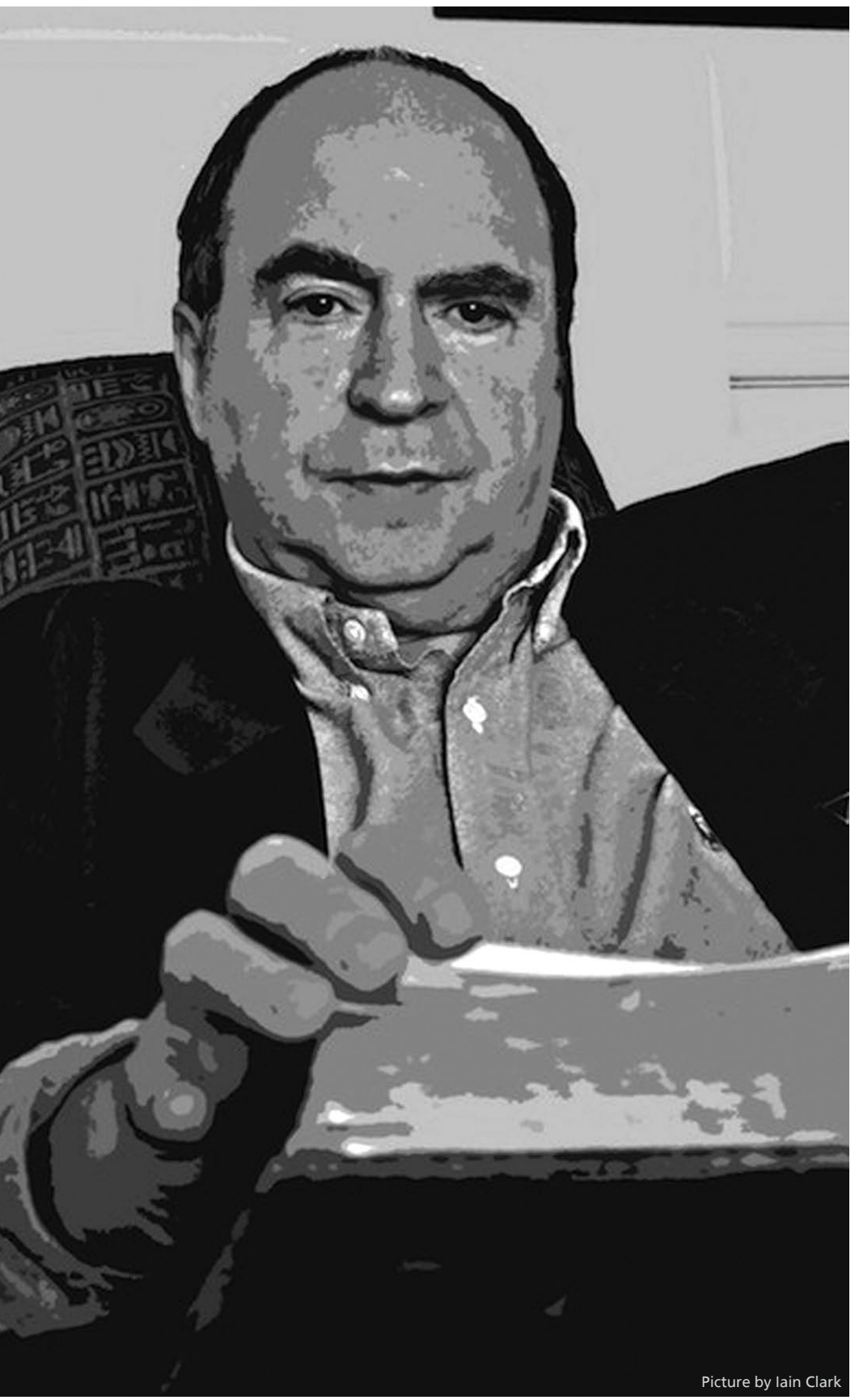
It's an old song known well within anarchist circles, but the whole sad story has woken many more people up to the realities of political life – and hopefully will help win some over to our point of view.

Ineffective: Knowledgable pirates will have no problem getting round the new laws

By Donnacha Delong

Opening the

Interview: Ade Dimmick talks to the famed author, Christie for the



Picture by Iain Clark

Four decades on from its first issue, Black Flag is one of the few remaining publications from that time. So it is a great pleasure to be able to interview its founding editor, or at least the surviving half of that editorship, Albert Meltzer having died in 1996, as we enter the next ten years of struggle.

When Black Flag was launched did you expect it to still be going 40 years later?

Didn't really think about it actually, our only concern was to get the next issue out and doing the other things we were doing.

Would you care to talk a little about the founding of Black Flag?

When I came out of prison in Spain one of my concerns was the lack of a pro-prisoners defence group, to which Albert suggested we re-launch the long-defunct Anarchist Black Cross, which we did. The result was Black Flag, which was subtitled "the organ of the Anarchist Black Cross."

We made an announcement about its launch at a meeting of the Anarchist Federation of Britain in Soho Square, London, that year – either late '67 or early '68.

At first it was duplicated, then Albert bought an offset-litho printer — and I learned how to use it from Ted Kavanagh who had worked with Albert at the Wooden Shoe Bookshop (and on Cuddons' Cosmoplitan Review).

We were based first of all in Coptic Street, then Albert rented premises in Kings Cross – and from there we moved to what became the Centro Iberico in Havelock Hill – all paid for entirely out of Albert Meltzer's own pocket.

History tells us there was some antagonism with the editors of Freedom?

Yes, there was a lot of antagonism with Freedom, but that had to do with the history – personal and political – between Albert and Vero Richards, and to a certain extent with Philip Sansom, tensions which went back to the 1940s and early 1950s.

Richards was a very patrician – and divisive – figure and as editor-in-chief, publisher and freeholder of Freedom, he behaved as though the anarchist movement were his personal fiefdom.

It's not uncommon in all political movements; there were close parallels with what happened with the CNT and the FAI secretariats/committees and the rank-and-file activists who supported armed resistance

Christie file

agitator – and Black Flag founding member – Stuart magazine's 40th anniversary on anarchism and us

after the Liberation in France in 1944. Germinal Esgleas, Federica Montseny and Roque Santamaria did much the same thing to marginalise Laureano Cerrada Santos who was a pivotal figure among the activists and the action/defence groups, much as Richards did to Albert, disparaging him and putting him down at every opportunity.

Are you surprised how Freedom has changed in recent years?

Not particularly surprised, just pleased.

How do you view the movement of today compared to when Black Flag began?

It's not really helpful to compare then with now: the political and social context of the 1950s and 1960s, the degree of radicalisation of the baby-boomer generation and all the expectations (and possibilities) we had for change. But probably most important of all was the fact that behind us was a powerful and radical rank-and-file working class labour movement, the trade unions, particularly the shop-stewards movement.

The anarchist movement today faces serious problems of apathy and alienation – and the lack of a cohesive labour movement.

Then we had an industrial proletariat, today it is a service-industry precariat, and an increasingly rootless one at that. Anyway, these are problems that this and future anarchist movements will resolve in their own way, and probably a lot more imaginatively than we were able to do.

Are you surprised by the relative lack of struggle in response to the current economic crisis compared to the 1970's?

We are living in different times, but I've no doubt the pendulum will swing our way again.

With 50 years of experience, do you have any suggestions on what we, as a movement, should be doing?

Absolutely none, other than keep spreading the word — and example!

Are you optimistic about the growth of the movement?

I'm always optimistic, not that the numbers game is at all important, I'd leave that to the SWP, but what is important is its continued existence and the influence of its ideas and the impact of its voice.

Where do you think today's movement can make the best mark on events?

Education, example and action.

What sort of response do you hope to see from the wider working class to the current situation? What do you expect?

At the moment, not a lot, but I hope to be surprised.

A few years ago you cast a vote for George Galloway's Respect party – has your politics changed much since writing and publishing seems to have become your primary focus?

No, neither my politics nor my world view have changed in any meaningful way since I was 18 except I can no longer call myself an anarcho-syndicalist as there is no organised labour movement to speak of – although I was, until recently, a member of the NUJ.

Also, while some people who need to get a life might see it as hair-splitting, I did not vote FOR Respect, I voted AGAINST the Labour Party on that particular day. I woke up that morning more than usually angry about Blair's war so, as it happened to be voting day, I thought to myself I'd make a gesture – other than throwing a brick through the party office window – Respect being the only party opposing the war and with the least chance of getting elected.

By the way, writing and publishing have always been my primary focus – as I keep telling the police! Nothing new there.

This is the sixth issue of Black Flag published by the "new" collective since the re-launch in October 2007. What do you think about it?

I must say I am extremely impressed not only with the production values, which would have enthused Albert no end – I can see him beam with pride even now – but with the extraordinarily rich mix of editorial copy. Congratulations!

For me it's not a question of agreeing or disagreeing with what the contributors are saying,

I'm very impressed with the broad range of views, themes and subjects you're covering – in fact what you appear to have done is seamlessly combine the politics of the original Black Flag with the cultural aspirations of the old Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review. If I had any criticism at all it would be that it could do with a bit more humour...

You are a prolific publisher, writer and anarchist film buff. Tell us a bit about the film archive you've been building...

I'm not a particular film buff, anarchist or otherwise. It just so happened that a few years back when video-streaming technology and improved broadband became available we decided to set up a community internet TV/video station in Hastings.

It coincided with some of the CNT-FAI films from 1936-37 becoming available on DVD, which I decided to put up on the site so it all built up from there. The communal TV station idea went down the tubes because we didn't have the funds to sustain it, the guy who originally funded it having been made bankrupt.

So, having learned a little about how to do it, I set up the christiebooks web site with a view to making available as many anarchist/libertarian oriented films as possible – all part of the educational process. We now have an archive of about 800 plus films to which we're adding more on a regular basis.

We have a growing number of audio broadcasts as well, and are trying to build up a photographic and poster archive along with pdfs of out of print texts – books, magazines, pamphlets and such like.

Dramatic tale: Detail from Pistoleros 1918

Would you like to tell us what you are doing at the moment? Have you got any interesting new projects up your sleeve?

The main problem is trying to keep the site going – it is quite expensive and we don't get any sponsorship apart from the occasional donation from generous comrades, but you can number those on the fingers of a one-handed man. Apart from that my time's mainly taken up with editing the second part of the McHarg memoirs – Pistoleros! 1919.

By Ade Dimmick

Reasons to say

Debate: Ade Dimmick mines history's best voices for answers to the question, should we vote?

Another general election. Once again, the question posed by many has been whether to vote or not to vote.

From a libertarian-left perspective, the answer to this question is a definate no. libertarian-communists generally view voting in parliamentary elections as a futile, pointless and irrelevant exercise; recognising it as corrupt and sham, a dishonest masquerade.

Universal suffrage, in essence, does nothing more than give people the illusion of self-governing, that they actually have a say in the running of their own lives, when in actual fact they still remain subject to the authority of the state and all its trappings. Parliamentary or bourgeois democracy achieves very little in the grand scheme of things because the hierarchical structure of political authority remains intact.

It is therefore important for us to take a closer look at the nature of parliamentary democracy itself. It is also worth noting that it was the anarchists in the early socialist movement who first hightlighted the pitfalls of bourgeois democracy and the fallacy of universal suffrage from a revolutionary perspective.

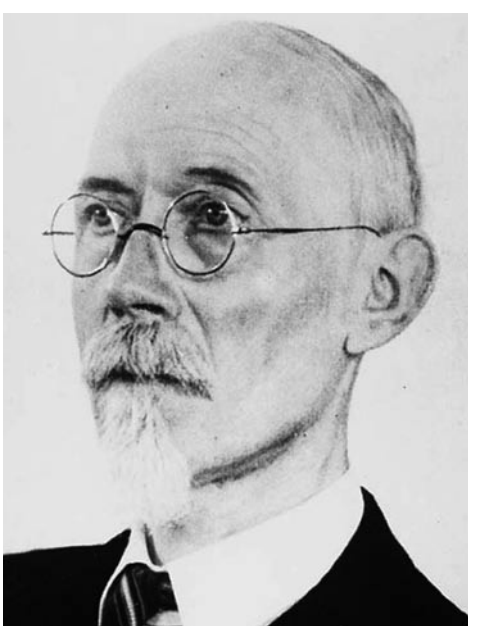
Later, however, progressive Marxist tendencies took up the abstentionist position. For this purpose I draw upon various sources from libertarian, left and council communist traditions.

Faith in bourgeois democracy and the exercising of one's franchise can be viewed as an abdication of self and class responsibility. Over the generations workers have been conditioned into believing they need leaders to act on their behalf, that it is within their best interests to embrace the parliamentary system.

In fact the advent of universal suffrage was a master stroke on the part of the ruling classes. It was a cleverly constructed distractional and diversional technique, successfully side-tracking an increasingly aware, revolutionary working class.

Anton Pannekoek (1920) wrote that: "Parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role.

"It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to arouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them…



Parallel traditions: Guy Aldred and Anton Pannekoek.

"The tactical problem is how we are to eradicate the traditional bourgeoise mentality which paralyses the strength of the proletarian masses; everything which lends new power to the received conceptions is harmful.

"The most tenacious and intractable element in this mentality is dependence upon leaders, whom the masses leave to determine general questions and to manage their class affairs. Parliamentarianism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution."

It follows from his logic that the present system cannot be reformed or changed from within; it must be overthrown and abolished. As the interests of the working class are not the same as those of the ruling class, revolutionary change can only arise out of class conflict.

Guy Aldred (1926)

A member of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation, Aldred wrote: "Parliament was never intended to emancipate the working class from the evils of capitalism, that it never can and never will achieve this result.

"For the function of parliament is to arrest and not to develop the political integrity and social power of the working class, to enmesh and not to emancipate the workers. Parliamentary Labour representation is not the enfranchisement of the working class.

"It is the disfranchisement of the workers, the studied, slowly erected and extended political barriers of class society, to ward off the ever-threatening and finally inevitable social upheaval of the oppressed and exploited class. He goes on to write:

"Even before a single vote has been obtained the Labour candidate has compromised. His very canditure exposes the weakness and inefficiency of parliamentary action. Seeking votes from an electorate anxious for some immediate reform, he puts aside the need for social emancipation to pander to some passing bias.

"He panders to predjudice and avoids facts. This is because Parliament is an institution existing for the defence of class society, the domination of man by man, the representation of opinions, and not the administration by the wealth producers of the wealth produced.

"Consequently the candidate must time the pulse of capitalist society, subject his first principles to the opinions arising out of capitalist conditions, to current local superstitions and respectabilities and immediate needs or fancied interests.

"He does not aim at assisting the toilers to secure the direct administration of wealth production by the wealth producers in the interests of the wealth producers. He aims only at representing as toilers, in the capitalist political institution, the opinion of men who must remain toilers so long as the Parliamentary system continues".

The parliamentarian promises so much to the electorate in the guise of reform and legislation. Then, once assuming the mantle of power and privilege in the Halls of Westminster, they never once acknowledge

stuff the ballot

or even attempt to fulfil their promises.

For the parliamentarian, there is no recourse, no breach of promise, no legal binding and no contractual obligation or penalty clause. These charlatans simply do their own thing; serving no interests other than their own, those of their party, the ruling class and the economic interests of capital.

Anton Pannekoek (1942)

"The parliamentarians, their body of supporters, are not selected by the constituents as mandataries to perform their will. The voters, practically, have only to choose between two sets of politicians, selected, presented and advertised to them by the two main political parties, whose leaders, according to the result, either form the ruling cabinet, or as "loyal opposition" stand in abeyance for their turn.

"The State officials, who manage the affairs, are not selected by the people either; they are appointed from above, by the government. Even if shrewd advertising calls them servants of the people, in reality they are its rulers, its masters."

Otto Rühle (1924)

Parliament is an instrument of bourgeois politics... As the bourgeois trades and negotiates goods and values in his life and office, at market and fair, in bank and stock exchange, so in parliament too he trades and negotiated the legislative sanctions and legal means for the money and material values negotiated.

"In parliament the representatives of each party try to extract as much as possible from the legislature for their customers, their interest group, their "firm." They are also in constant communication with their producers' combines, employers' associations, cartels, special interest associations or trade unions, receiving from them directions, information, rules of behaviour or mandates.

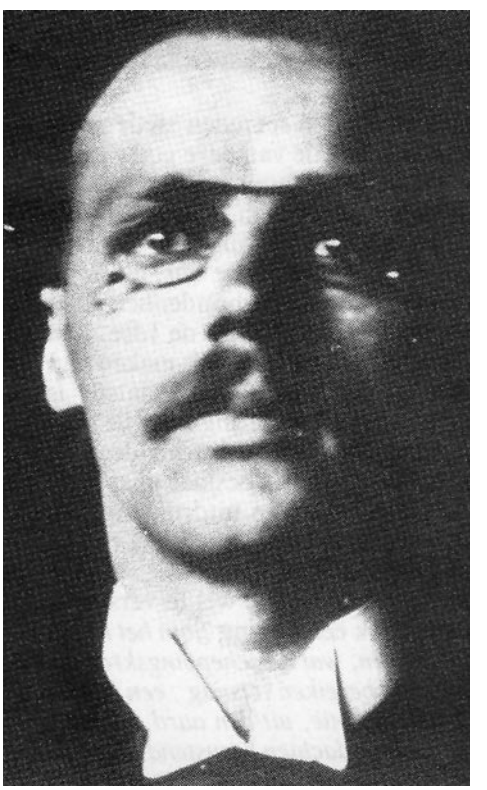
"They are the agents, the delegates, and the business is done through speeches, bargains, haggling, dealing, deception, voting manoeuvres, compromises. The main work of parliament, then, is not even done in the large parliamentary negotiations, which are only a sort of spectacle, but in the committees which meet privately and without the mask of the conventional lie.

Herman Gorter (1920)

"The workers themselves have fought here, often for years, for universal suffrage, and have thus obtained it, directly or indirectly. This was also a victory, which bore fruit at the time. The thought and the feeling generally prevails, that it is progress, and a victory, to be represented, and entrust one's representative with the care of one's affairs in parliament. The influence of this ideology is enormous.

"And finally, reformism has brought the working class of Western Europe altogether under the power of parliamentary representatives, who have led it into war, and into alliances with capitalism. The influence of reformism is also colossal.

"All these causes have made the worker the slave of parliament, to which he leaves all actions. He himself does not act any longer.



Unimpressed: Otto Rühle and Herman Gorter

"Then comes the revolution. Now he has to act for himself. Now the worker, alone with his class, must fight the gigantic enemy, must wage the most terrible fight that ever was. No tactics of the leaders can help him. Desperately the classes, all classes, oppose the workers, and not one class sides with them.

On the contrary, if he should trust his leaders, or other classes in parliament, he runs the risk of falling back into his old weakness of letting the leaders act for him, of trusting parliament, of persevering in the old notion that others can make the revolution for him, of pursuing illusions, of remaining in the old bourgeois ideology."

Paul Mattick (1975) reiterated that parliamentary parties are a product of bourgeois society, an expression of the political democracy of laissez-faire capitalism and only meaningful within this context.

There are many revolutionary critiques of parliamentary democracy. This selection of various abstentionist arguments is just a small example. What it highlights is that the parliamentary road is certainly not the road towards working class emancipation.

The road to working class emancipation is revolutionary; it is an anti-capitalist, anti-statist and anti-parliamentary road; through independent working class organisation, solidarity, internationalism and unrelenting class-struggle; culminating in the organisational realisation of workers councils and the ultimate creation of a society based upon libertarian communist principles.

By Ade Dimmick

Notes

1. Quoted in Anti-Parliamentary Communism: The Movement for Workers' Councils in Britain 1917-45. Mark Shipway. P.24. MacMillan Press. 1988
2. Socialism and Parliament Pt.1. Guy Aldred. P.8&9. Strickland Press. 1942
3. Workers Councils. Anton Pannekoek. P.31. AK Press. 2003
4. From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution. Otto Rülh. P.24/25. Socialist Reproduction. 1974.
5. Open Letter to Comrade Lenin. Herman Gorter. P.19.20. Wildcat. 1989
6. Workers Councils. Anton Pannekoek. P.xxx. AK Press. 2003

Liberty is an

Breathing Utopia: Rob Ray talks to an anarchist librarian about how his role might change in a society where information is truly free

Libraries face unique challenges over the next few decades. As more and more information is put online and pressure continues to be put on public services their role is set to come under intense scrutiny. So interviewing a library worker on what his role might be like "post revolution" doesn't initially seem a promising prospect.

But James is confident that libraries would survive – and more than that, would become an integral part of a free society. "Libraries will be far more integrated into the social structure as a service. One of the things libraries do is inform people about serious issues in society in a space where people can educate themselves – for example on domestic violence.

"But at the moment that's very different from organisations which deal with these issues specifically.

"One of the things is that it would become more an initial point of contact for people facing difficult issues.

"Libraries are public forums which can help to promote and support debate, this is something which is already going on in some libraries.

"For example in Suffolk there are events such as Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) month, Black History Month and on International Women's Day. On the first two it was very much just getting information out. But for International women's Day there were actually representatives of organisations there and that's the direction I would see things going in.

"We would provide the starting point for debate and knowledge but also bring people in to drive it and engage with social issues. Obviously in a future society such issues would be greatly reduced but there will always be problems which need addressing and libraries provide a good model for that."

Beyond its position as a centre for self-education, the library's primary role is of course as a source of books.

James is unsure what will happen to books as technology improves – some are already predicting the death of paper once the next generation of low-power, flexible e-readers becomes cheap enough to reach the mainstream, potentially holding thousands of works each on their hard-drives and providing an equal reading experience to paper.

However he doesn't think that under capitalism or in an anarchist society it would finish off libraries. "On the one hand there's the issue of paperless technology, but I think there is scope for both digital and printed resources.

"More significantly, there's a big difference between full-time education, the information available online and the sort of help and information on researching topics that we can present to people. Providing a point and a human face to help people find what they need will always be needed."

"In fact I think that some aspects of lending would probably become more important, though in different ways to how the system works now.

"At the moment, libraries offer access to resources people wouldn't otherwise be able to buy for themselves, or which they wouldn't use often. While with communism there would be more to go around, the

open book...

library system also offers an efficient way of offering out rare equipment – microfiche readers for example, or big printers.

"In some cases it will help switch us to everyone being able to use something, rather than everybody trying to own one each.

"At the moment this can't go on with today's firms, because it wouldn't make money – although companies may use pooled vehicles or IT equipment across department exactly because it's more efficient. In a commercial setting everyone sharing something makes no sense, but in a post-revolutionary setting I could see libraries providing that function."

In terms of how social change might help his profession, James would look forward to the end of copyright laws which he says are a needless block on libraries functioning as they should.

More than that however, would be the end to a process of deskilling which successive administrations have pushed in the name of cutting outgoings.

"One of the things that would be eliminated would be the limitations of copyright we currently have to deal with. At the moment we're bringing in ebooks for example, but bizarrely, a person can only download an electronic file to read for three weeks before deleting it.

"That's simply ludicrous, these things can be copied endlessly for almost no cost if the need for commercial profit is removed. Another issue is DVDs which we can't bring out until after they're had their time on the shop shelves.

"A major problem is that access to information is restricted. Because of the limitations of useage you often have to photocopy individual pages when researching, which can be almost impossible if it's a major text.

"As a public institution we're even more hamstrung than individuals, we're not even allowed to print out a picture off the internet without getting permission from the author first.

"Training meanwile would have to see major improvements, particularly if the scope for what was led did get bigger.

"You'd need shift over from simply having librarians picking up and shelving books to learning how to reference and help people with difficult questions. It's a skill which is being lost at the moment due to cutbacks and it's something which we actually need to deal with now rather than later."

By Rob Ray

The day anarchy

History: 100 years since Kroptkin's famed definition

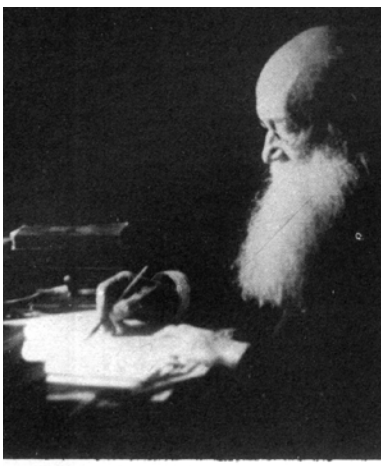
Peter Kropotkin
Encyclopeadia Britannica
1910

ANARCHISM: The name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government – harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of productiaon and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being.

In a society developed on these lines, the voluntary associations which already now begin to cover all the fields of human activity would take a still greater extension so as to substitute themselves for the state in all its functions.

They would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international temporary or more or less permanent – for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs.

Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary – as is seen in organic life at large – harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the state.



If, it is contended, society were organised on these principles, man would not be limited in the free exercise of his powers in productive work by a capitalist monopoly, maintained by the state; nor would he be limited in the exercise of his will by a fear of punishment, or by obedience towards individuals or metaphysical entities, which both lead to depression of initiative and servility of mind.

He would be guided in his actions by his own understanding, which necessarily would bear the impression of a free action and reaction between his own self and the ethical conceptions of his surroundings.

"Man would thus be enabled to obtain the full development of all his faculties, intellectual, artistic and moral, without being hampered by overwork for the monopolists, or by the servility and inertia of mind of the great number.

He would thus be able to reach full individualisation, which is not possible either under the present system of individualism, or under any system of state socialism[1].

In the early 20th century anarchists across the globe were at the forefront of the struggle against the State in revolutions, insurrections and labour unrest.

State repression prompted bombings, shoot-outs and assassinations, countered with an unprecedented severity by government forces. Lengthy prison sentences and executions were commonplace, usually on trumped up or cover-all conspiracy charges. Anti-anarchist hysteria and propaganda, usually implicating foreigners, was constantly churned out by the press.

Amid all this, one of the most definitive statements of anarchism as a revolutionary alternative and political philosophy was published in 1910 by prestigious academic tome the Encyclopædia Britannica.

Its author was Peter Kropotkin, a distinguished and well-respected geographer and zoologist. A biographical note describes him as a "geographer, author and revolutionary." His article was simply signed PAK. This year is the 100th anniversary of the publication of Kropotkin's academic treatise on anarchism in the 11th Edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica[2].

In 1927, Roger N. Baldwin[3] wrote an editorial note in the publication Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets – A Collection of Writings by Peter Kropotkin: "This scholarly article ... is included because it is the best brief statement in English of the precursors of anarchist thought.

"Its objective treatment detaches it at once from propaganda, and its appearance in so authoritative a publication was intended to present a statement of the anarchist position to those not connected with the labour or revolutionary movement. It is useful for those who want a compact view of communist-anarchism by the man best qualified to state it – and the kind of thing to show an unfamiliar inquirer who wants to know, what it is all about."

The Encyclopædia Britannica was first published in 1768. However there is an interesting significance to this particular edition. It is a 29-volume reference work which marked the transition from British to American control.

Its content is phenomenal. It contains over 44 million words; 40,000 entries; 30,000 pages and over 1,500 contributors from 18 countries, taking up three feet of shelf space. This edition was also the first to include female contributors[4]. As well as his contribution on anarchism, Kropotkin wrote some 90 other entries, mainly on geography, zoology and science.

Impressed: Roger N Baldwin

Looking further at Britannica 11, as it is sometimes called, Kropotkin follows his introduction to anarchism by looking at the source and historical development of anarchist philosophy. He references scholars of the ancient world such as Lao-tsze, Aristippas and Zeno. From the middle ages he takes the influences of religious groups like the Hussites and Anabaptists and later the utopian writers Rabelais and Fenelon.

He writes of William Godwin: "It was Godwin, in his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, who was the first to formulate the political and economical conceptions of anarchism, even though he did not give that name to the ideas developed in his remarkable work. Laws, he wrote, are not a product of the wisdom of our ancestors: they are the product of their passions, their timidity, their jealousies and their ambition.

"The remedy they offer is worse than the evils they pretend to cure. If and only if all laws and courts were abolished, and the decisions in the arising contests were left to reasonable men chosen for that purpose, real justice would gradually be evolved. As to the state, Godwin frankly claimed its abolition. A society, he wrote, can perfectly well exist without any government: only the communities should be small and perfectly autonomous.

"Speaking of property, he stated that

was recognised

the rights of every one 'to every substance capable of contributing to the benefit of a human being' must be regulated by justice alone: the substance must go 'to him who most wants it'. His conclusion was communism. Godwin, however, had not the courage to maintain his opinions. He entirely rewrote later on his chapter on property and mitigated his communist views in the second edition of Political Justice[5]."

A large section is then understandably devoted to Proudhon – the first person to use the word anarchy to describe a stateless, non-governmental society. Following a section on individualism, which acknowledged Warren, Stirner, Spooner and Tucker, Kropotkin brings us up to date (in his time) with the origins of the International Working Men's Association.

He writes: "A general depression in the propaganda of all fractions of socialism followed, as is known, after the defeat of the uprising of the Paris working men in June 1848 and the fall of the Republic. All the socialist press was gagged during the reaction period, which lasted fully 20 years.

"Nevertheless, even anarchist thought began to make some progress, namely in the writings of Bellegarrique (Caeurderoy), and especially Joseph Déjacque. The socialist movement revived only after 1864, when some French working men, all "mutualists," meeting in London during the Universal Exhibition with English followers of Robert Owen, founded the International Working Men's Association.

"This association developed very rapidly and adopted a policy of direct economical struggle against capitalism, without interfering in the political parliamentary agitation, and this policy was followed until 1871. However after the Franco-German War, when the International Association was prohibited in France after the uprising of the Paris Commune, the German working men, who had received manhood suffrage for elections to the newly constituted imperial parliament, insisted upon modifying the tactics of the International, and began to build up a social democratic political party.

"This soon led to a division in the Working Men's Association, and the Latin federations, Spanish, Italian, Belgian and Jurassic (France could not be represented), constituted among themselves a federal union which broke entirely with the Marxist general council of the International. Within these federations developed now what may be described as modern anarchism.

"After the names of 'federalists' and 'anti-authoritarians' had been used for some time by these federations the name of 'anarchists,' which their adversaries insisted upon applying to them, prevailed, and finally it was revindicated."

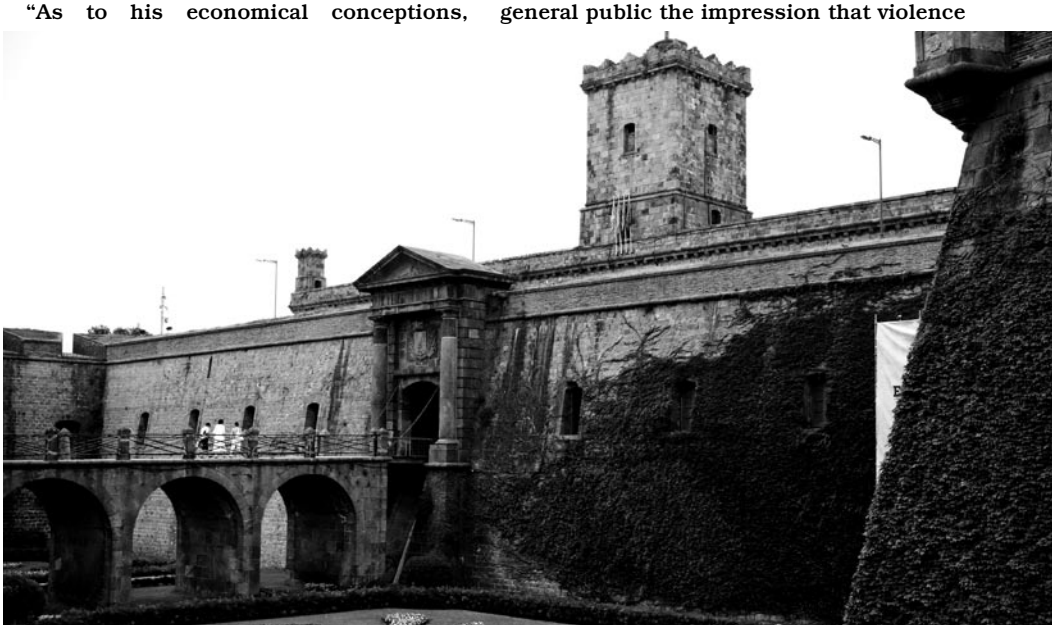
He goes on to write: "Bakunin soon became the leading spirit among these Latin federations for the development of the principles of anarchism, which he did in a number of writings, pamphlets and letters. He demanded the complete abolition of the state, which – he wrote – is a product of religion, belongs to a lower state of civilisation, represents the negation of liberty, and spoils even that which it undertakes to do for the sake of general well-being.

"The state was a historically necessary evil, but its complete extinction will be, sooner or later, equally necessary. Repudiating all legislation, even when issuing from universal suffrage, Bakunin claimed for each nation, each region and each commune, full autonomy, so long as it is not a menace to its neighbours, and full independence for the individual, adding that one becomes really free only when, and in proportion as, all others are free. Free federations of the communes would constitute free nations.

"As to his economical conceptions, Bakunin described himself, in common with his federalist comrades of the International (César De Paepe, James Guillaume, Schwitzguébel), on a 'collectivist anarchist' – not in the sense of Vidal and Pecqueur in the 1840s, or of their modern social democratic followers, but to express a state of things in which all necessaries for production are owned in common by the labour groups and the free communes, while the ways of retribution of labour, communist or otherwise, would be settled by each group for itself. Social revolution, the near approach of which was foretold at that time by all socialists, would be the means of bringing into life the new conditions.

"The Jurassic, the Spanish and the Italian federations and sections of the International Working Men's Association, as also the French, the German and the American anarchist groups, were for the next years the chief centres of anarchist thought and propaganda. They refrained from any participation in parliamentary politics, and always kept in close contact with the labour organisations. However, in the second half of the '80s and the early '90s of the nineteenth century, when the influence of the anarchists began to be felt ... violent prosecutions were directed against them, especially in the Latin countries (including physical torture in the Barcelona castle) and the United States (the execution of five Chicago anarchists in 1887).

"Against these prosecutions the anarchists retaliated by acts of violence which in their turn were followed by more executions from above, and new acts of revenge from below. This created in the general public the impression that violence is the substance of anarchism, a view repudiated by its supporters, who hold that in reality violence is resorted to by all parties in proportion as their open action is obstructed by repression, and exceptional laws render them outlaws."



Notorious: Barcelona castle saw the torture and execution of anarchists Picture: Sharon Mollerus

In conclusion, I believe that the very fact I am today writing this 100th anniversary tribute to Kropotkin's classic essay bears testament to its enduring truth and continuing relevance – as do all the anarchist writings of the late 19th and early 20th century.

By Ade Dimmick

Notes

1. Anarchism. Peter Kropotkin. Encyclopedia Britannica. 11th Edition . 1910/11.
2. The 1th edition was published in 1910 and 1911.
3. Roger Nash Baldwin was a co-founder of the American Union Against Militarism, a founder of the American Civil Liberties Union, spent time in prison as a consciencious objector during WW1, and was part of Sacco and Vanzetti's defence team.
4. www.joslinhall.com/britannica.htm
5. From the Kropotkin Archive at dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives
6. Kropotkin Archive

BLINDED BY

Anarchists in the class struggle (or communist) tradition, such as the AnarchistFederation, do not see the world in terms of competing national peoples, but in terms of class. We do not see a world of nations in struggle, but of classes in struggle.

The nation is a smokescreen, a fantasy which hides the struggle between classes which exists within and across them. Though there are no real nations, there are real classes with their own interests, and these classes must be differentiated. Consequently, there is no single "people" within the "nation" and there is no shared "national interest" which unifies them.

Anarchist communists do not simply oppose nationalism because it is bound up in racism and parochial bigotry.

It undoubtedly fosters these things, and mobilised them through history. Organising against them is a key part of anarchist politics.

But nationalism does not require them to function. Nationalism can be liberal, cosmopolitan and tolerant, defining the "common interest" of "the people" in ways which do not require a single "race." Even the most extreme nationalist ideologies, such as fascism, can co-exist with the acceptance of a multiracial society, as was the case with the Brazilian Integralist movement.

Nationalism uses what works – it utilises whatever superficial attribute is effective to bind society together behind it. In some cases it utilises crude racism, in other cases it is more sophisticated. It manipulates what is in place to its own ends. In many western countries, official multiculturalism is a key part of civic policy and a corresponding multicultural nationalism has developed alongside it. The shared "national culture" comes to be official multiculturalism itself, allowing for the integration of "citizens" into the state without recourse to crude monoculturalism. If the nationalist rhetoric of the capitalist state was of the most open, tolerant and anti-racist kind, anarchists would still oppose it.

This is because at heart nationalism is an ideology of class collaboration. It functions to create an imagined community of shared interests and in doing so to hide the real, material interests of the classes which comprise the population. The "national interest" is a weapon against the working class, and an attempt to rally the ruled behind the interests of their rulers. The ideological and sometimes physical mobilisation of the population on a mass scale in the name of some shared and central national trait have marked the wars of the 20th and 21st centuries – the bloodbath in Iraq rationalised in the name of Western democratic culture and the strengthening of the domestic state in the name of defending the British or American traditions of freedom and democracy against Islamic terror are recent examples.

Ultimately, the anarchist opposition to nationalism follows a simple principle. The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. This is not just a slogan, but the reality of the world we live in. Class antagonism is an inherent part of capitalism, and will exist irrespective of whether intellectuals and political groups theorise about its existence or non-existence. Class is not about your accent,

THEIR FLAGS

In Focus: The Anarchist Federation explains its position on nationalism

your consumption habits, or whether your collar is blue or white. The working class – what is sometimes called the proletariat – is the dispossessed class, the class who have no capital, no control over the overall conditions of their lives and nothing to live off but their ability to work for a wage. They may well have a house and a car, but they still need to sell their ability to work to an employer in return for the money they need to live on. Their interests are specific, objective and material: to get more money from their employers for less work, and to get better living and working conditions.

The interests of capital are directly opposed: to get more work out of us for less, to cut corners and costs, in order to return a higher rate of profit and allow their money to become more money more quickly and efficiently.

Class struggle is the competition between these interests. Even non-productive workplaces are shaped by these rules, as they are the fundamental principles of capitalist society.

The interests of capital are expressed through those with power, who are likewise obliged to maintain these interests in order to keep their own power – owners of private capital, the bosses who make decisions on its behalf, and the state which is required to enshrine and defend private property and ownership rights.

The "national interest" is simply the interest of capital within the country in question. It is the interest of the owners of society, who in turn can only express the fundamental needs of capital – accumulate or die. At home, its function is to domesticate those within a society who can pose antagonism with it – the working class. This antagonism, which is inherent to capitalism, is one which anarchists see as being capable of moving beyond capitalism. We have to struggle in our interests to get the things we need as concessions from capital. This dynamic takes place regardless of whether elaborate theories are constructed around it. Workers in China or Bangladesh occupying factories and rioting against the forces of the state are not necessarily doing it because they have encountered revolutionary theory, but because the conditions of their lives mean they have to. Similarly class solidarity exists not because people are charitable but because solidarity is in their interests.

The capitalists have the state – the law, the courts and prisons. We only have each other. Alone we can achieve very little, but together we can cause disruption to the everyday functioning of capitalism – a powerful weapon. Of course, class struggles are rarely pure and unsullied things, and they can be overlaid with bigotries and factional interests of various kinds. It is the job of revolutionary groups and anarchist organisation in the workplace to combat these tendencies, to contribute to the development of class consciousness and militancy and to complement the process by which divisions are challenged through joint struggle which takes place within struggles of significant magnitude.

The ruling class are fully aware of these issues, and are conscious in acting in their interests. Solidarity is the only thing we can hold over their heads, and for that reason the state takes great care to get us to act against our own interests. Nationalism is one of their greatest weapons in this regard, and has consequently served an important historical purpose. It lines us up behind our enemies, and demands we ignore our own interests as members of the working class in deference to those of the nation. It leads to the domestication of the working class, leading working class people to identify themselves in and through the nation and to see solutions to the problems they face in terms of it.

> The "national interest" is simply the interest of capital within the country

This is not terminal as we already know; circumstances can force people to act in their interests, and through this process ideas develop and change. To take a dramatic example from history, workers across the world marched off to war to butcher one another in 1914, only to take up arms against their masters in an international wave of strikes, mutinies, uprisings and revolutions from 1917 onwards.

Nonetheless, nationalism is a poison to be resisted tooth and nail. It is an ideology of domestication.

It is a weapon against us. It is an organised parochialism, designed to split the working class – which as a position within the economic system is international -—— along national lines.

Ultimately, even if we lay aside our principled and theoretical opposition to nationalism, the idea of any kind of meaningful national self-determination in the modern world is idealism. Nations cannot self-determine when subject to a world capitalist market, and those who frame their politics in terms of regaining national sovereignty against world capitalism, such as contemporary fascists and their fellow travellers, seek an unattainable golden age before modern capitalism. The modern world is an integrated one, one where international 'co-operation' and conflict cannot be readily separated, and which are expressed through international institutions and organisations like the UN, WTO, World Bank, EU, NATO, and so on. The nationalist fantasy is an empty one as much as it is a reactionary one. Anarchists recognise as much in their opposition. We will return to this point later.

Before we go further, it is necessary to pre-empt a common and fallacious 'criticism'. We do not stand for monoculture. We do not seek to see the rich diversity of human cultural expression standardised in an anarchist society. How could we? The natural mixing of culture stands against the fantasies of nationalists.

National blocs are never impervious to cultural influence, and culture spreads and mingles with time. The idea of self-contained national cultures, which nationalists are partisans of, is a myth. Against this we pose the free interchange of cultural expression in a free, stateless communist society as a natural consequence of the struggle against the state and capitalism.

The anarchist communist opposition to nationalism must be vocal and clear. We do not fudge internationalism. Internationalism does not mean the co-operation of capitalist nations, or national working classes, but the fundamental critique of the idea of the nation and nationality.

■ *This extract is taken from a pamphlet entitled Against Nationalism (2009) and was originally the chapter entitled Why do anarchists oppose nationalism? Further details appear in Hob's Choice, our pamphlet review column on page 32.*

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On the child

Radical Reprint: In the wake of Colin Ward's death, we pay tribute in the form of an extract from one of his best works

The quest for personal privacy and a sense of social isolation are not opposites in the experience of the urban child. The same child who is most deprived of a private and personal place is likely to be the child who is most isolated socially.

... A survey conducted for the Community Relations Commission found that just under half of the children under five in the Handsworth district of Birmingham never went out to play. "They have no access either exclusive or shared to play spaces at the front or back of the house and their parents feared for their safety if they let them out."

Describing an infants' school in Islington in north London, Sue Cameron remarks that 'The experience of many of these children during the first five years of their lives has been so limited that they come to school like so many blank pages. Near the school is a park and a busy Underground station, but many of the children have never been inside the park and some of them don't know what a tube train looks like. Asked what they did at the week-end they usually say they "just stayed at home."

Even when we assume that they must have been around by the time they reach thirteen or fourteen we find that the world of such children is fantastically restricted. Teachers in a school on a housing estate in Bristol told me of the shock with which they learned that some of their teenage pupils had never been to the centre of the city.

Teachers in the London borough of Brent told me of 13 and 14-year-olds who had never seen the Thames; teachers in the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark, in schools a few hundred yards from the river, told me of pupils who had never crossed it.

... Kevin Lynche's UNESCO study ... found that distance is not the essential restriction on the movement of young adolescents away from their local areas.

More important is the mixture of parental control, personal fear and a lack of knowledge of how to get about, as well as the availability and cost of public transport. "It is thus not surprising that many of the children speak constantly of boredom. There seems to be little to do or see that is new."

Few stimuli: Manchester Road in Bradford. Picture: Paul Stevenson

Innumerable studies of delinquent or potentially delinquent children in the world's cities stress their insecurity and isolation. Arych Leissner, with experience of both New York and Tel Aviv, remarks that "street club workers were constantly aware of the feelings of isolation which pervaded the atmosphere."

"The young, as well as the adults of these poor communities identify themselves as inhabitants of their own immediate neighbourhoods. But they say that they are 'going to Tel Aviv' when they leave their own areas to attend to some business in other parts of the city, sometimes only a few minutes' walk or a short bus ride away. They distinguish between shops cinemas cafes. etc. in their own neighbourhood and 'in Tel Aviv.'

"Although their own communities are geographically and administratively integral parts of the City of Tel Aviv the people who live in these communities do not seem to feel as if they are."

In Chicago, J F Short and F.L. Strodtbeck noted that "the range of gang boys' physical movements is severely restricted not only for fear of other gangs, but also because of a more general lack of social assurance". James Patrick found the same "social disability" in the Glasgow boys he observed.

... The lack of social assurance certainly does amount to a social disability for many city children. Some children steal not because they have no access to the purchase money, but because they find it a less arduous transaction than the verbal encounter with the seller.

... The poor child, who is usually the most isolated from the life of the city as a city, is also, paradoxically, the child who is denied the solace of solitude. He is seldom alone; he is the child who is least likely to have a bedroom or a bed to himself.

In many of the cities of the world the very concept of privacy for the child is meaningless. What sense does it make in Hong Kong or Manila to speak of the child's right to privacy? We may suggest that people don't miss what they have never experienced and there is evidence that different cultures have different concepts of personal space, though even in the poorest of cities, one of the things that wealth buys is privacy.

... What does privacy actually mean to the child? Maxine Wolfe and Robert Laufer of the City University of New York have ... found that the idea became more complex with age, but they found four major meanings at all ages. The first was that of being alone

in the city

and uninterrupted or of being able to be alone. The second was that of controlling access to information - being able to have secrets.

... The third meaning was that of "no one bothering me" and the fourth was that of controlling access to spaces.

Three of these four meanings were given more frequently by those children who had their own rooms ... "no one being able to go into my room, no one can come in unless I want them to." Keeping secrets and not telling what you are thinking, were available to all groups, though this aspect of privacy, the control of information is obviously important to those children who were not able to secure it physically.

The researchers point out that "a child who has never had a room of his own may not define privacy as a physical separation from others but may develop techniques of psychological withdrawal.

"A child in a small town, once aware that control of personal history is impossible, may not see this as a relevant aspect of privacy."

The comparison with the situation of the small-town child raises the question of the relative isolation and privacy of children all along the rural-urban continuum. We assume that the country child is more isolated but he is usually part of a far more homogeneous community ... We assume that he had more privacy but, as Maxine Wolfe and Robert Laufer suggest, "If city children walk around the corner or a few streets away from home there is a high probability they will not be known. The child living in a small town may have to go further (i.e. into the woods) to achieve the same type of privacy."

The isolated child in the city is unfamiliar with the public transport system, with the use of the telephone, with the public library service, with eliciting information from strangers, with the norms of behaviour in cafes and restaurants, with planning his activities in advance, with articulating or responding to requests outside the immediate family circle.

The reader might well ask whether such a child really exists and the answer from any inner city teacher would be that children as isolated as this from the mainstream of urban life exist in very large numbers.

Various attempts are made to provide an explanation for their isolation: the idea of a culture of poverty, the idea of a cycle of deprivation, and the idea of a restricted language code.

Each of these explanations has its passionate opponents who see them as modern versions of the Victorian equation of poverty with sin, the idea that the poverty of the poor is their own fault, or as an assumption of the superiority of middle-class values.

But if we simply want to know why so large a proportion of inner city children grow up unable to manipulate their environment in the way that is taken for granted in the middle-class home we are bound to look for explanations in the social isolation of the home of the modern inner city child, soberly analysed by Martin Deutsch in these terms: "Visually, the urban slum and its overcrowded apartments offer the child a minimal range of stimuli. There are usually few if any pictures on the wall and the objects in the household, be they toys, furniture. or utensils tend to be sparse, repetitious and lacking in form and colour variations.

"The sparsity of objects and lack of diversity of home artifacts which are available and meaningful to the child in addition to the unavailability of individualised training, gives the child few opportunities to manipulate and organise the visual properties of his environment and thus perceptually to organise and discriminate the nuances of that environment."

The tragedy of the isolated city child ... was most poignantly expressed by John and Elizabeth Newson in their long-term study of child-rearing in an English city: "Parents at the upper end of the social scale are more inclined on principle to use democratically based highly verbal means of control, and this kind of discipline is likely to produce personalities who can both identify successfully with the system and use it to their own ends later on.

"At the bottom end of the scale in the unskilled group, parents choose on principle to use a highly authoritarian criteria, mainly non-verbal means of control in which words are used more to threaten and bamboozle the child into obedience ... and this seems likely to result in a personality who can neither identify with nor beat the system.

"In short, privileged parents, by using the methods that they prefer, produce children who expect as of right to be privileged and who are very well equipped to realise these expectations; while deprived parents, also by using the methods that they prefer, will probably produce children who expect nothing and are not equipped to do anything about it."

This is a bleak conclusion made all the more pointed by the fact that it is the outcome of many years of investigation and reflection. It underlines the vital compensatory role of nursery education, of efforts to improve the quality of child-minding and of all those attempts, in and out of the schools to enlarge the environmental experience and capability of inner city children.

Happier? Children in the Foy's Lake slum in Chittagong, Bangladesh Picture: Piers Brown

But it also leads us to speculate on the difference between the "slums of hope" and the "slums of despair." Oscar Lewis who invented the concept of the culture of poverty remarked that in Cuba or in the squatter cities of Peru, Turkey, Athens, Hong Kong and Brazil, there are millions of poor people, but little sign of the culture of poverty.

For the child in such places. there are few of the blessings of privacy, but we may speculate that there is little of the crippling isolation that envelopes the poor child in the rich cities.

■ *This is an edited extract from The Child In The City (1990 edition), Available for £7.95 from Freedom bookshop, ISBN 0719912598.*

By Colin Ward

Prefuturist anarchism

Errico Malatesta, an Italian Anarchist revolutionary and propagandist in the 1920s wrote two articles entitled Let's Demolish…and then? and Postscript to ´Lets demolish…and then?

In these he wrote of the need for revolutionaries to have firm and practical ideas about how to replace the institutions we wish to abolish. A clear example would be food: in a hypothetical situation in which somehow the working class (as a general term describing those that do not constitute, and are exploited by the ruling class) managed to destroy the institutions of the state and capital, how would we feed ourselves the very next day?

If we do not have solid answers to questions such as these, all talk of revolution is foolish and perhaps even dangerous, as a successful insurrectionary period against the established order would most likely simply result in chaos, out of which a new oppressive order would arise.

If people's experience of post-revolutionary life seems to be significantly worse than what preceded it, it is only to be expected that they will put trust in authoritarian figures promising a return to stability – and such figures, history shows, can always be expected to reveal themselves.

If we accept this line of reasoning, it seems imperative for those interested in working to achieve such a revolution to experiment in the here-and-now with "anarchic" alternatives to the hierarchical structures which today, whether we like it or not, meet so many of our basic needs.

If such alternatives are discovered, it then becomes imperative to raise awareness as much as possible of their existence and the practicalities of how they function. For instance, if an ingenious and feasible alternative to policing and incarceration is devised by a small collective of revolutionary experimenters, they must spread the knowledge of it as much as possible amongst the general population.

Therefore, if a successful insurrection ever takes place there will hopefully be enough people with knowledge of this new system to be able to implement it immediately, or without significant delay. Thus if the mass of people perceive that their quality of life has significantly improved as a result of the revolution, it is likely that they will keep faith in it and work to advance its ends, which after all, should be their own.

This revolutionary experimentation, or "prefuturist anarchism," cannot be limited merely to material questions. It must also be about experimentation in different modes of relating both to one another, and our environment, for a genuine revolution is a fundamental change in social relations, with consequences for all aspects of our lives. Prefuturist anarchists would ask the question "how would I behave after the revolution, in a given situation?" This is in line with prefuturism in general, which is a philosophical school that conceptualises the present in terms of its relation to an as-yet-undefined future, asking the question "what would I do now, with the benefit of hindsight?"

The great appeal of prefuturist anarchism is that it is not necessary for its participants to actually believe in the likelihood, or even possibility of an anarchist revolution coming about. They may simply like the idea of anarchism, or even just prefer the "anarchic" alternatives to material, social and environmental relations to the mainstream.

Trying again: A straw bale building project at Ringsfield Hall, where parents learned to build their own classroom for teaching children in an alternative learning environment

There are many people in such a condition who may never join a revolutionary organisation or even discuss the idea of revolution as a serious possibility. But this would not stop them from participating in, say, workshops on consensus decision making, or a co-operative enterprise of some kind. Thus what many revolutionary anarchists dismiss as "lifestylism" is actually integral to the class struggle, as long as it meets the above criteria of being combined with attempts to spread "anarchic" alternatives beyond the limited circles in which they are currently practiced. Anarchist revolutionary strategy is, by necessity "a strategy of having many strategies," as an American comrade once put it. Workplace agitation is one such strategy, "lifestylism" is another, and it is meaningless to debate which is the more significant as to be ultimately successful they must complement each other.

The practice of mutual aid and co-operation in the here and now almost always helps the cause of revolution, the exception of course being co-operation with the bosses, the state, or any other source of authority when they try to prevent revolutionary activity.

"Revolutionary" activity itself can be said to be prefuturistic when it is undertaken in non-revolutionary circumstances. We imagine ourselves in a post-revolutionary mode of existence, in which class society and the institutions, ideologies and relations that sustain it have been abolished. We then imagine ourselves looking back, with hindsight, to the present and ask: "What did I do back then which helped to achieve this?" We then base our action in the present on such a thought process.

This is not to say that such a revolution is inevitable – one of the fundamental errors of certain branches of Marxism. All that we can ever know about the future is that is has not happened yet. This truism is the existential basis for pre-futurist thought.

The condition of being "before the future" or "prefuturist" is fundamental to human existence. However, recognition of the agency of our conscious desires allows us to know at least one more basic fact about the future: that our actions, conscious or not, will affect it. And if the future is up for grabs, at least in the sense that it is not predetermined, why shouldn't we be the ones to try and grab it?

If a hypothetical post-revolutionary future is desirous to us, why should we not work to achieve revolution?

This line of argument may not be enough to convince the anarcho-cynics, but the beauty of prefuturist anarchism is that it does not need to. As long as they participate in activities that may have a knock-on effect on making possible a revolution in the future, whether or not they do it for that reason, then they are revolutionaries, and so is anyone else who participates in such activity.

So enough of "class struggle anarchists" moaning about "hippies" and "lifestylists". To commit yourself to living differently from the norm in this society is truly a struggle in itself, and one which goes hand in hand with the struggle to liberate the working class.

And enough of lifestylists and Anarcho-cynics dismissing revolutionary ideology and its adherents as close-minded idealists stuck in the past. Class society still exists, as is evident by a moment's contemplation of social reality, so opposition to such a society should not be considered a relic of a bygone age but an urgent necessity for the present.

By Raz Chaoten

How private interests are wrecking the NHS

With £20billion of cuts now in the offing alongside an ongoing privatisation agenda which is finally kicking into high gear, the stage is set for a wholesale restructuring of the health service in the second decade of this century.

Trusts have been told to find the money as part of a major cutting back of support to the sector which has been quietly taking place following publication of the Lord Darzi 2007 report on healthcare.

Darzi argued that most NHS services should be switched out of localised facilities to huge "polyclinics" – effectively saying centralisation would be the best way to improve care despite known issues with distance making this far more difficult in a number of different fields and potentially fatal – from dealing with emergencies to forcing difficult journeys onto the long-term ill.

A recent Primary Care Foundation study suggests that in the case of A&E departments, the Darzi system would cope well with just 10% of people currently treated and is "jaw-droppingly" expensive compared to the current sytem.

Yet despite these warnings, massive cuts are being demanded over and above what is being planned for the rest of the public sector. The upshot is that today's policies will require hospitals to maintain high levels of care while being financially hamstrung, punishing an inability to match up to targets with the withdrawal of more cash.

And those targets are devastating. The government is demanding that levels of care remain the same, while imposing savings which conservatively will require cuts in nursing budgets of up to 37% and on doctors of up to 42%.

On top of this are proposals to accelerate the takeover of "failing" NHS Trusts (the bodies which oversee healthcare in a particular area) by Foundation Trusts – arm's-length management organisations for hospitals – or even by private firms.

The long game

Chaotic though the situation may seem, these changes have been planned for a long time and the current proposals are an effective culmination of a doing down of the NHS which parallels, albeit on a much larger scale, what has been happening to the Royal Mail.

Before New Labour had even taken power, Thatcherite plans to "free" the NHS were intended as the first step towards quietly displacing the huge service out of public hands and into the private sector.

Initially touted as the creation of an "internal market" designed to improve care through increased competition for resources, her plot to normalise capitalist practice within the service was ultimately a disaster, with subsequent research from Bristol University showing the highest death rates occurring in areas where competition had been introduced.

The unpopular measure was scrapped when Labour came to power in 1997, however it provided the template for further private sector promotion under Blair and Brownite governments in years to come.

Unlike the Tories, New Labour took a multipronged approach to the problem of privatising the health sector.

Initially offering money to Trusts in the midst of the economic boom years of the '90s, Blair and Brown encouraged higher spending and thus better services, famously declaring "historic levels of investment."

Under threat: Homerton Hospital in Hackney, London. Picture: Julie Cookson

However much of this was phantom or short-term cash, which was later withdrawn while demanding that NHS Trusts maintain the same level of service year on year – while crucially, denying them the right to hold over money in years when they made a surplus, for example if flu levels were low.

On top of this, the government launched what it called the greatest investment in health since the service was first founded – the PFI contracts which saw hospitals across the country rebuilt.

In fact the scheme was a scam, effectively forcing hospitals to open themselves up to 30 year mortgages on their income – the money paid by central government for every operation undertaken – in order to build hugely overpriced facilties they didn't need. Most will continue to pay the price for another two decades.

When many were unable to keep stable finances as a result, this was pointed to as proof that the service wasn't being well run "despite massive investment."

Finally, they reintroduced marketisation of the service, with the promotion of Private Healthcare Centres which stole away patients who required only simple forms of care and leaving NHS Trusts with the most expensive cases – even though payments were the same for each patient.

For Trusts which survived this process, there was a carrot – increased independence and the ability to ask for private loans through a "promotion" to Foundation Trust status. For those that didn't, ignominious austerity measures beckoned and – as has recently happened in Cambridgeshire – the possibility that it would be taken over by another trust or a private firm.

The current situation brings to a head all the problems which have been inflicted on the NHS by Labour and the Tories. Over the next decade, the buzzword of "choice" will herald the privatisation of the health service and its administration into a system of "procurement" such as is seen in the railways.

The end game is a US-style system, where the state demands a spiralling amount of cash in taxes to pay for a dwindling service.

By Rob Ray

The war of control

Those who argue that anarchism would never work sometimes cite the practice of medicine as an example of the type of situation where a libertarian outlook would create insuperable problems and have disastrous consequences.

Medicine is one of the areas which are sometimes said to be necessarily authoritarian and hierarchical, beyond the scope of a self-managed society based on workers' control because of its complexities and the specialised knowledge required.

Yet critiques of established or orthodox medicine, in theory and practice over many centuries, have perhaps more often than not taken a markedly libertarian turn, whether from people who tried to find ways of helping and with luck healing themselves and each other, or from reformers within the profession who were ready to demystify and democratise their subject.

Some of these have been consciously radical and even revolutionary in intention, seeing collective efforts at mutual aid as pointing a path towards a different organisation of society.

History

Traditional histories of 'western' medicine usually pointed out a path of progress, overall, towards 'scientific' remedies, and in Britain the supposedly universal access to a health service provided by a benevolent state.

Writers who were often doctors themselves paid homage to the great men, 'fathers' of this and that advance or specialism – a history riddled with paternity suits.

By the later 20th century this view was being challenged from various perspectives, including feminist ones; the work of medical historians, notably Roy Porter, transformed the subject, and the debates continue.

Radical Thinkers

In Britain the later 18th century was a time of widespread satire and scepticism about medical practice and the power of doctors. John Moore, himself a Glasgow physician and surgeon, wrote in Medical Sketches, 1786: "The difference between a good physician and a bad one is certainly very great, but the difference between a good physician and no physician at all, in many cases, is very little."

He advocated the "healing power of nature" as against "being teased to swallow drugs... a species of distress to which the rich are more exposed than the poor, provided the latter keep out of hospitals."

The pioneer feminist and political writer Mary Wollstonecraft, 1759-97, had quite a lot to say on the subject of health care in her various works. In her Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, 1786, she particularly recommended the study of

Under threat: The modern NHS is facing major cuts. Picture:Salim Fadhley

for our healthcare

Overview: Libertarian approaches to medicine

elementary medicine for women, who were often expected to nurse any ailing relative.

Her first novel, Mary: A Fiction (1788) drew on her own experience in this respect, represented in the title character: "Her anxiety led her to study physic [medicine]..." "Mary, with an authoritative voice, insisted on knowing [the physician's] real opinion. Reluctantly he gave it..."

Fictional Mary finds a "poor woman... dying of a putrid fever, the consequence of dirt and want..." and takes direct action to help her. "Mary sent the husband for a poor woman, whom she hired to nurse the woman, and take care of the children... Her knowledge of physic had enabled her to prescribe... Cleanliness and wholesome food had a wonderful effect." Among other things, she comments on the harm done by "the close air of the metropolis".

The topics of medicine and health care are also more prominent in Wollstonecraft's best-known work, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), than might be expected, from advice on the benefits of exercise to further development of the idea of medicine as a career for women. "Women might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses. And midwifery, decency seems to allot to them..."

She rejected the notion of female delicacy debarring them from such study: "I have conversed, as man with man, with medical men, on anatomical subjects, and discussed the proportions of the human body with artists – yet such modesty did I meet with, that I was never reminded by word or look of my sex, or of the absurd rules which make modesty a whimsical cloak of weakness.

And I am persuaded that in the pursuit of knowledge women would never be insulted by sensible men, and rarely by men of any description, if they did not by mock modesty remind them that they were women."

This was not a romantic idealisation of traditional female folk-healing: "Women should be taught the elements of anatomy and medicine... for the bills of mortality are swelled by the blunders of self-willed old women, who give nostrums of their own without knowing any thing of the human frame."

She also took the opportunity to denounce assorted "quacks" and charlatans as preying on the gullibility and folly of many women, as in the "fashionable deceptions... practised by the whole tribe of magnetisers..."

Her prescription was typically straightforward: "If the functions of life have not been materially injured, air, exercise and a few medicines, prescribed by persons who have studied the human body, are the only human means, yet discovered, of discovering that inestimable blessing health, that will bear investigation." "Nervous complaints, and all the vapourish train of idleness" earned her contempt.

In medical as in other contexts, she did not believe in passively putting up with whatever was happening around or being done to her; she held strong views and made them known.

Realising at the same time that even basic common-sense measures were not within everyone's reach, she showed awareness of the social causes of ill-health: from the repression and confinement imposed on female children and the fads and fancies of their mothers, if upper class, to the grinding poverty and ill-paid labour that was the lot of the lower classes. In a second, unfinished, novel, The Wrongs of Woman (aka. Maria) a significant and original character is the asylum attendant, Jemima, the narration of whose life is an indictment of the contemporary society not least in the lack of medical care for the poor.

She describes her experiences after an accident at work: "Hospitals, it should seem (for they are comfortless abodes for the sick) were expressly endowed for the reception of the friendless; yet I... wanted the recommendation of the rich and respectable, and was several weeks languishing for admittance.

"Fees were demanded on entering; and, what was still more unreasonable, security for burying me, that expence [sic] not coming into the letter of the charity. A guinea was the stipulated sum – I could as soon have raised a million; and I was afraid to apply to the parish.

"I was dismissed before my cure was completed, because I could not afford to have my linen washed to appear decently, as the virago of a nurse said, when the gentlemen (the surgeons) came. I cannot give you an adequate idea of the wretchedness of a hospital; every thing is left to the care of people intent on gain... Every thing appeared to be conducted for the accommodation of the medical men and their pupils, who came to make experiments on the poor, for the benefit of the rich..."

In her post at the asylum she has no illusions: "The offer of 40 pounds a year, and to quit a workhouse, was not to be despised, though the condition of shutting my eyes and hardening my heart was annexed to it... Four years have I been attendant on many wretches, and the witness of many enormities."

Hit and miss: Mary Wollstonecroft denounced "quack" male doctors

With regard to the care of babies and small children, however, Mary Wollstonecraft found herself more in tune with advanced medical opinion than with prevailing reliance on traditional practices: "I have often heard women ridiculed... only because they adopted the advice of some medical men, and deviated from the beaten track in their mode of treating their infants... [by adopting] new-fangled notions of ease and cleanliness.

"What a number of human sacrifices are made to that moloch prejudice!" A book

to be titled Letters on the Management of Infants was left uncompleted at her death.

An outspoken critic of doctors in the early 19th century was Richard Carlile, a radical, free-thinking printer, bookseller and writer who was repeatedly sentenced to imprisonment because of his consistent refusal to pay much attention to the law.

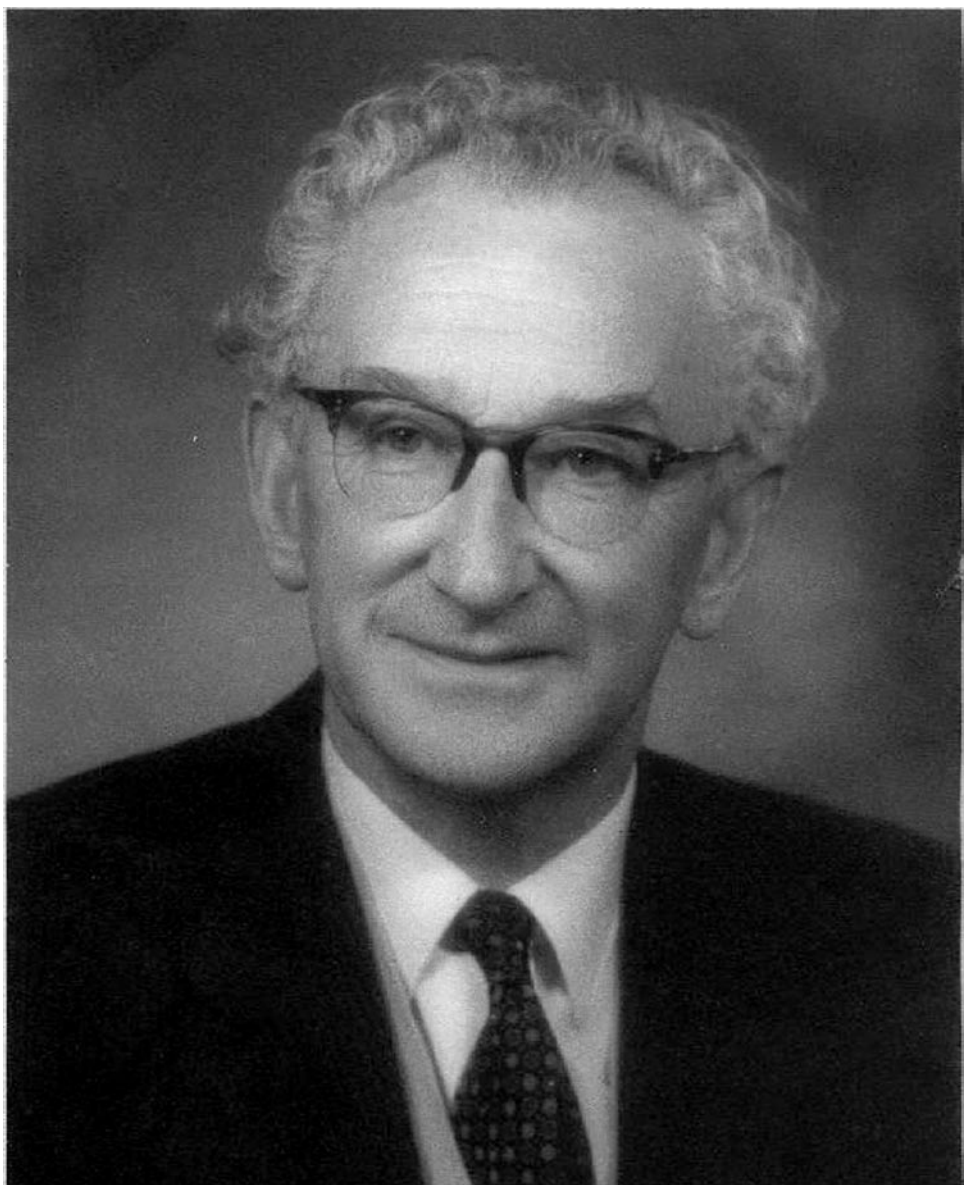
He could justly claim that some of his best friends were doctors, notable among them Thomas Wakley, the first editor of the reforming medical journal The Lancet, but he did not like the surgeon of Dorchester Gaol, where he was confined in the 1820s.

He wrote to this character in 1825, asserting the right to his medicine of choice (in this case an unfortunate one, crude mercury) and took the opportunity to criticise medical education, but explicitly not all medical men, "the majority of the more intelligent part" of whom he counted among his sincerest friends and supporters.

The less intelligent part he compared unfavourably with their "wiser medical predecessors, the old women [...] Like those old ladies, with you, it was hit or miss, every case an experiment: if the patient is killed, the fault is the disease; if he recovers, wonderfully clever doctor! There is much less chance of being killed by an old woman for a doctress, as she will not be so rash with her experiments [...]"

State Take-over

Later in the 19th century ordinary working people were beginning, or continuing in a different way to take matters into their own hands and organise collectively in case they should fall ill or meet with an accident, forming friendly societies and medical institutes that enabled them to have access to effective affordable medical care.



Influential: David Stark Murray was a key agitator for health reform.

Anarchist theoretician Colin Ward charted how "the tradition of fraternal and autonomous associations" sprang up from below and flourished until displaced by a system of "authoritarian institutions directed from above."

When the form of a British National Health Service was still under discussion, not a foregone conclusion, the debate was opened up by the 1943 Penguin Special, The Future of Medicine, by Dr David Stark Murray.

The author was a founder member (1930) of the Socialist Medical Association (SMA) and later its president (1951-70), who continued his agitation for what he saw as a truly socialist health service long after 1948.

The SMA re-named itself in May 1981 as the Socialist Health Association "to reflect a shift in emphasis to the prevention of illness through the promotion of good health. The SHA now engages primarily in public education and lobbying on health issues."

Although a socialist rather than libertarian, he insisted that medicine should not be the exclusive business of experts and favoured a free, comprehensive, universal service under democratic control, based on local Health Centres.

His outlook included the idea that the discoveries and methods of science could provide models for social reorganisation, that science and medicine are deeply integrated with wider society and that environmental surroundings and the general standard of living are crucial determinants of individual and national health.

Because of the complexity of modern medicine he also believed in teamwork and in the role of the GP, supported by close contact with specialist services.

A Different Approach

A number of noted libertarian doctors have been highly competent, even eminent in their professional lives while believing their expertise should be demystified and made accessible to rational discussion, and that matters of health should be everyone's concern, since "ordinary" people are well able to take decisions if provided with the relevant facts

In late 20th century Britain proponenets included Alex Comfort (author of The Joy of Sex among many other things), Chris Pallis (a.k.a. Maurice Brinton of Solidarity), John Hewetson (GP and former editor of Freedom anarchist newspaper). These paralleled writers in 1930s Spain auch as CNT/FAI adherents Isaac Puente (author of Libertarian Communism), Felix Martí Ibañez, and Amparo Poch y Gascon.

Anarchists can also point to some small and larger-scale examples where an alternative was tried out and achieved a degree of practical success.

In London, the Peckham Health Centre (pictured right at a checkup session) opened in 1926, in an experiment or "pilot project" devised by two doctors to study "the living structure of society" and to try to identify ways of actively generating health. Later it was housed in a specially-designed building with day nursery, play area, and swimming pool.

Like a club, it had membership, open to local families on payment of a small weekly subscription. Its organisation was on the principle of autonomy. People made their own decisions about medical treatment, taking or leaving the advice given, and members were encouraged to set up their own activities using the Centre's resources.

The doctors explained that the centre was not for treatment but for the promotion of health, to detect by periodic medical examination any incipient or existing disease and to advise, without directing, how to obtain treatment if necessary.

During the Second World War it was forced to close but in 1945 its organisers, members and supporters campaigned successfully to get the building back. A Petition pointed out that the PHC was "not a polyclinic dealing with the sick but a Health Centre dealing

with the cultivation of health."

Although it re-opened in 1946 and continued for a few years after the inauguration of the NHS, the centre's respite was temporary, despite repeated efforts to secure funding and endorsement from the authorities.

A research programme dated October 1949 tried unsuccessfully to interest the Medical Research Council in its laudable objective: "the unfolding of the fullest human capacities" with "organism and environment in mutual synthesis."

But it did not fit in to the post-war scheme of things, on a number of counts: its focus on health not illness; the required, though small membership fee; and its philosophy of encouraging self-activity.

In David Goodway's words: "It was based on autonomous administration and so did not conform to the lines of administration laid down by the Ministry of Health. This last anomaly highlights a wider problem of the general hostility in the years after 1945 from within the structures of the welfare state to any initiative originating outside and hence non-statist and libertarian."

Revolutionary Spain

In a very different context, a more developed version of anarchist ideas on medical practice and health provision is to be discovered in accounts of the collectives established in Spain in the revolutionary upsurge that was sparked off by the Nationalist coup of July 1936. In areas where anarchists and syndicalists were numerous they experimented with new ways of providing health care among other services while struggling to survive, and to wage war.

Public health in the Republican zone during the civil war laboured under massive disadvantages and disruption; international medical aid notwithstanding, the burden in many areas inevitably fell on the local people with whatever skills and resources they had. There were doctors who supported the attempts to put theories of social revolution into practice within the context of popular resistance to the military insurrection; some in the view of at least one historian were among the best Spanish libertarian militants.

Accounts of the collectives, often unashamedly partisan while being backed by copious evidence from witnesses and observers, praise them for having devoted much attention to medical and health services which they endeavoured to provide free of charge at point of use.

Gaston Leval collated many detailed reports, based on first-hand observation of their efforts and achievements in various parts of the country: "The socialisation of medicine was becoming everybody's concern, for the benefit of all. It constituted one of the most remarkable achievements of the Spanish Revolution." (Collectives, p. 278)

In his view, new hospitals placed under "a kind of governmental aegis" were only the old establishments with a change of name, whereas those, much more numerous, taken over by the syndicate were, with considerably less means, created anew on holistic, organic principles.

Like other workers, doctors were directed to places where the need for them was felt most, and no longer disproportionately served the rich areas. When a locality asked for a doctor from the syndicate, it would first check up on local needs and then select from its list of available members the practitioner whose qualifications were most suitable, and he or she would have to give good reasons if s/he wished to decline the posting.

Medicine was presumed to be at the service of the community, not the other way round. In the new clinics, operations were carried out free of charge as was treatment in psychiatric hospitals. As Glasgow anarchist Ethel Macdonald reported after visiting a hospital "purely under CNT control: All the staff are comrades and share alike."

Although doctors' responses were naturally not unmixed, reportedly more than half the practitioners co-operated voluntarily with such arrangements.

Further steps taken were the general organisation of everything to do with pharmaceutical products and improvements in treatment for injuries suffered at work, with full-time medical services in large factories and workplaces.

Non-anarchist patients often commended the quality of care they received from nurses, many of whom were trained by the anarchist women's organisation Mujeres Libres, which made health care and health education a priority in its work, aided by women doctors.

As the imperfections of profit-driven and bureaucracy-dominated systems become ever more catastrophically evident, the Peckham Health Centre of mid-20th century London and the anarchist collectives of 1930s Spain, among other examples – some of which no doubt have still to emerge from historical research into the hidden areas of people's autonomous self-activity – attest not only the validity of libertarians' past critiques of orthodox medicine but their potential for implementing practical alternatives in the future.

By Liz Willis

Factfile: Referrals and further reading

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A hymn of

History: Exploring the anarchist

It often seems that libertarian-influenced events and organisations have become irreversibly linked with Marxism. The International Workingmen's Association (IWMA, the First International) and the 1871 Paris Commune are associated these days more with Marx than Proudhon, even though it was the followers of the French anarchist who helped create the former and gave the latter its distinctive characteristics.

Much the same can be said of the socialist anthem The Internationale, written by Communard and follower of Proudhon Eugène Pottier in June 1871.

While the song is (rightly) considered as patrimony of the wider socialist movement and sung by socialists of all kinds, it can also be considered as part of Proudhon's legacy. This is often obscured by the fact that, from 1922 to 1944, The Internationale was the de facto national anthem of the Soviet Union. It is safe to say that its author would have been disgusted by such a development.

The song's lyrics were written immediately in the wake of the bloody crushing of the Paris Commune and as Leninist Donny Gluckstein notes in his analysis of them, "they inevitably reflect Pottier's views" as "a follower of Proudhonism." [Decyphering The Internationale: the Eugène Pottier code, International Socialism, no. 120]

Verses three and four, he suggests, "show the influence of Proudhonism on Pottier" as "Proudhonist thinking on power and the state is laid out." Proudhon "concluded that freedom was impossible while a state structure existed. He therefore called on workers to ignore politics and the state, and focus their efforts on grassroots self-activity."

This, Gluckstein argues, was reflected in the International's founding document: "When, in 1864, the IWMA was founded and Marx was tasked with formulating its platform he acknowledged the positive part of the Proudhonist argument. The 'General Rules' begin with these words: 'That the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves.' Pottier's rejection of any 'saviour from on high' expresses this sentiment perfectly."

Marx and Pottier were repeating Proudhon's 1848 statement that "the proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of the government." This was because the state "finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat." [Proudhon, System of Economical Contradictions, p. 399]

For Proudhon, working class people had to organise themselves for their own liberation for "it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave." [Op. Cit., p. 398]

This can be seen in The Internationale, with the pre-figurative nature of the IWMA being reflected in Pottier's lyrics. In France, Gluckstein notes, members "joined the IWMA directly and in so doing believed they were engaging in self-emancipation and self-activity from below. In their terms they had begun the process of superseding capitalism." This meant that the IWMA would be the embryo of the free society and so by joining "self-governing communes would develop and the state would disappear" and so the "chorus is literal. If the masses grouped together in the International this organisation would come to embody the human race."

As with his book on the Commune, Gluckstein gets basic aspects of Proudhon's ideas here (see "The Paris Commune, Marxism and Anarchism" for more discussion [Anarcho-Syndicalist Review, no. 50, Summer 2008]). For example, Gluckstein asserts that the "reference to banking" in The Internationale "is pure Proudhon" for, unlike Marx who "located the exploitation of workers at the core of the capitalist production process," Proudhon saw "poverty and riches" in terms of "the taking of bank interest, dividends and 'unearned increments'."

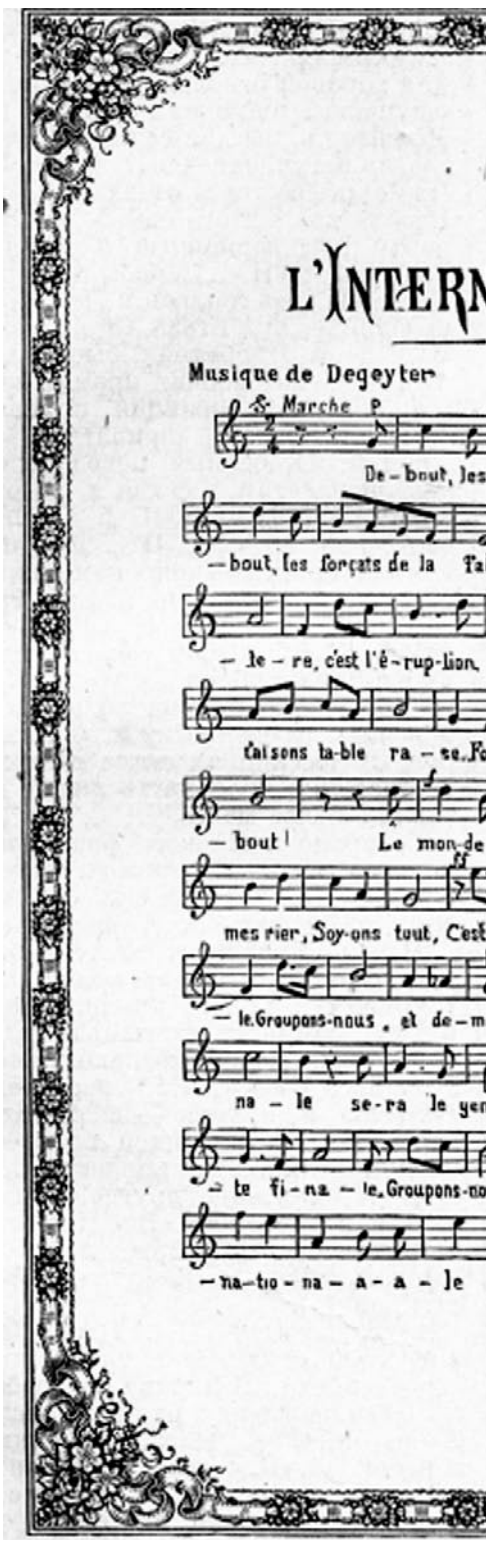
This is not true, as Proudhon presented an analysis of exploitation rooted in the workplace, in wage-labour. Thus we find Proudhon arguing that property "is the right to enjoy and dispose at will of another's goods – the fruit of another's industry and labour." [What is Property?, p. 171] He was well aware that workers produced a value greater than what they received in wages and so exploitation occurred in production.

This can be seen from Proudhon's concept of collective force: "[The capitalist] has paid nothing for that immense power which results from the union and harmony of labourers, and the convergence and simultaneousness of their efforts. Two hundred grenadiers stood the obelisk of Luxor upon its base in a few hours; do you suppose that one man could have accomplished the same task in two hundred days? Nevertheless, on the books of the capitalist, the amount of wages would have been the same."

The capitalist has therefore "paid all the individual forces" but "the collective force still remains to be paid. Consequently, there remains a right of collective property" which the capitalists "enjoy unjustly." [Op. Cit., p. 127 and p. 130]

Gluckstein himself supports this view when nothing that Proudhon thought: "If workers could obtain interest free loans they could organise co-operative industrial production which would link together in local communes." If Proudhon believed that exploitation occurred in the market, in exchange, then why would he so consistently have supported workers' associations? And why would he explicitly link that to solving the problem of "the collective force?"

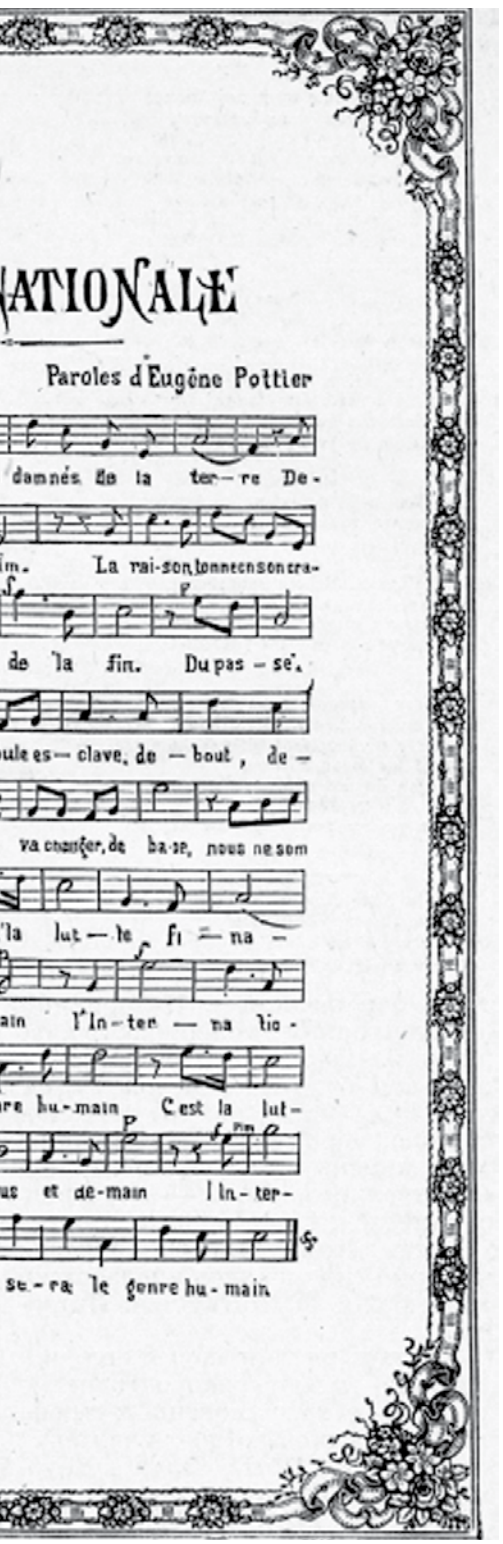
It should be noted that Marx repeated Proudhon's analysis of the role of "collective force" in essentially the same fashion but without acknowledgement. Marx discussed how a capitalist buys the labour-power of 100 men and "can set the 100 men to work. He pays them the value of 100 independent labour-powers, but does not pay them for the combined labour power of the 100." [Capital, Vol. 1, p. 451]



Sadly, Marx failed to repeat his earlier comment in The Holy Family that "Proudhon was the first to draw attention to the fact that the sum of the wages of the individual workers, even if each individual labour be

revolution

song which changed the world



paid for completely, does not pay for the collective power objectified in its product, that therefore the worker is not paid as a part of the collective labour power." [Collected Works, vol. 4, p. 52]

Gluckstein is on firmer ground with his comments on Proudhon's reformism. He notes that "Proudhon believed this could successfully compete against the capitalists, whereupon the current economic system would collapse and a new society would emerge."

Subsequent anarchists, like Bakunin and Kropotkin, rejected this vision in favour of revolution. These anarchists were well-aware that, to quote Gluckstein, "it was not enough to establish a model of democracy and liberation for others to emulate. The French state was, after all, preparing to attack Paris and drown the Commune in blood." Consequently, they advocated a revolutionary militia associated with the federation of communes to defend a revolution, a position which Bakunin had come to before the Commune began.

Gluckstein asserts that "[i]f this song had been merely a Proudhonist tract it would suffered the fate of Proudhonism itself" and would have "faded away after 1871, curiosities relegated to the museum of ideology."

Yet, "Proudhonism" did not die after 1871. Just as it had done after Proudhon's death, it changed. From "Proudhonism," libertarian ideas evolved and changed into the collectivist-anarchism (most famously associated with Bakunin) and then communist-anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism.

As Bakunin put it in his analysis of the Paris Commune, his ideas were "Proudhonism widely developed and pushed to these, its final consequences." [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 198] It would be a mistake, however, to think that this evolution was the product of Bakunin, French Proudhonists had already taken similar steps (thus we find that Eugène Varlin "seems to have moved independently towards his collectivist position." [George Woodcock, Anarchism, p. 239]).

While "Proudhonism" in its pure form may have disappeared, most of its key ideas continued in the form of revolutionary anarchism and syndicalism (not that there is much difference between the two). This can be seen from the subsequent political activitism of such participants in the Commune as Louise Michel, Élisée Reclus and others.

To conclude Gluckstein is right in saying: "Understanding Proudhonism or the Commune helps to decode Pottier's Internationale" and that "[r]eciting Pottier's verse today therefore links us to a long and proud tradition... The Internationale continues to play a role in inspiring an alternative vision." The key difference is that this tradition and vision is that of libertarian socialism, not Leninist state capitalism.

Sadly, as with the Commune itself, the obvious Proudhonian themes have been hidden by its use by other schools of socialism, many of which are distinctly at odds with its vision of a decentralised socialism based on free association and federation of communes and workers' co-operatives.

So, while a socialist anthem, The Internationale was inspired by a specific form of socialism, libertarian socialism. It is sad that it has been appropriated by forms of socialism so much at odds with the ideas and ideals which inspired its creation.

By Iain McKay

THE INTERNATIONALE

Arise, wretched of the earth
Arise, convicts of hunger
Reason thunders in its crater
This is the eruption of the end
Of the past let us wipe the slate clean
Masses, slaves, arise, arise
The world is about to change its foundation
We are nothing, let us be all
Chorus:

This is the final struggle
Let us group together, and tomorrow
The Internationale
Will be the human race
There are no supreme saviours
Neither God, nor Caesar, nor tribune.
Producers, let us save ourselves
Decree the common welfare
So that the thief expires,
So that the spirit be pulled from its prison,
Let us fan the forge ourselves
Strike the iron while it is hot
Chorus...

The state represses and the law cheats
The tax bleeds the unfortunate
No duty is imposed on the rich
'Rights of the poor' is a hollow phrase
Enough languishing in custody
Equality wants other laws:
No rights without obligations, it says,
And as well, no obligations without rights
Chorus...

Hideous in their self-glorification
Kings of the mine and rail
Have they ever done anything other
Than steal work?
Into the coffers of that lot,
What work creates has melted
In demanding that they give it back
The people wants only its due.
Chorus...

The kings make us drunk with their fumes,
Peace among ourselves, war to the tyrants!
Let the armies go on strike,
Stocks in the air, and break ranks
If these cannibals insist
On making heroes of us,
Soon they will know our bullets
Are for our own generals
Chorus...

Labourers, peasants, we are
The great party of workers
The earth belongs only to men
The idle will go reside elsewhere
How much of our flesh they feed on,
But if the ravens and vultures
Disappear one of these days
The sun will always shine
Chorus...

The day that broke Thatcher's power

The Tory Government had decided to implement a new tax on April 1st 1990 to replace local government taxation systems.

They described as their most important, "flagship" legislation. It was to be a tax on each person rather than on property (as before).

The government named it the "Community Charge," but protestors dubbed it 'the Poll Tax', drawing parallels with the legendary Poll Tax mass uprisings in 1381 which had successfully defeated the idea for 600 years.

It was immediately seen as a tax on the poor (who lived in more crowded conditions than the rich, obviously) and an extension of government powers over the population due to the need for registration of every individual.

It had been introduced into Scotland the previous year to uproar, with massive defiance and popular independent local campaigns in every neighbourhood encouraging non-cooperation and non-payment.

They were mostly up against Labour Party administrations (which dominated local government, including almost all working class communities). A majority of people refused to pay.

Mass opposition and protests Inspired by hatred of the government, of the tax, and by the inspirational grass-roots movement in Scotland, a mass movement of thousands of local Anti-Poll Tax groups grew up in every community in England in the build up to the implementation date, April 1st 1990.

Local and regional Anti-Poll Tax Federations were formed.

As each local government authority set the poll tax level they hoped to collect from the local population there were huge and angry protest mobilisations at Town Halls all over the country, sometimes involving thousands of local residents.

Mass movement: Marchers against the tax.

The battle of Trafalgar

A countrywide demonstration was planned for Central London. On March 31st 1990 over 250,000 people participated in the demo, calling for mass non-payment and resistance to the tax. There was a carnival atmosphere.

As the demonstration passed Thatcher's headquarters (Downing St) there was a confrontation with police, which soon turned into a battle with mounted police and riot units. Eventually, Trafalgar Square nearby became a battleground as thousands of people fought police for control of the square.

As the police became more desperate and brutal the battle spread to nearby streets and throughout the main commercial streets in the West End. It went on for hours.

The media and politicians went hysterical, trying to deflect public anger (at the tax and at the repressive policing) against the "irresponsible" anti-poll tax movement and the "extremists" who fought the police. Some thought that the battle had been planned by the State to discredit the radical nature of the struggle (mass non-payment and street protests) and split the movement.

Up to 500 people were arrested during and after the demo, and many charged with heavy charges. There were raids on dozens of activists' homes over the next few weeks in a policing operation that was called 'Operation Carnaby'.

In April, defendants and supporters set up the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign which supported all those arrested and helped them fight their case, as well as campaigning for the whole anti-poll tax movement to back those arrested (including the hundreds jailed for non-payment of the tax). And to demonstrate again in Trafalgar Square in defiance of police calls to ban certain types of demos in Central London. All this was achieved.

Thatcher Out

The stakes were very high. The repression was countered. The movement stayed united and defiant. Public support increased after the demo. By the following year 18 million people were refusing to pay the tax.

Thatcher resigned, largely as a result of the damage to her credibility and strategy over the poll tax fiasco. And a few days before an anniversary demo at Trafalgar Square the next March, PM John Major announced that the tax was uncollectable and would be scrapped.

This movement showed that:

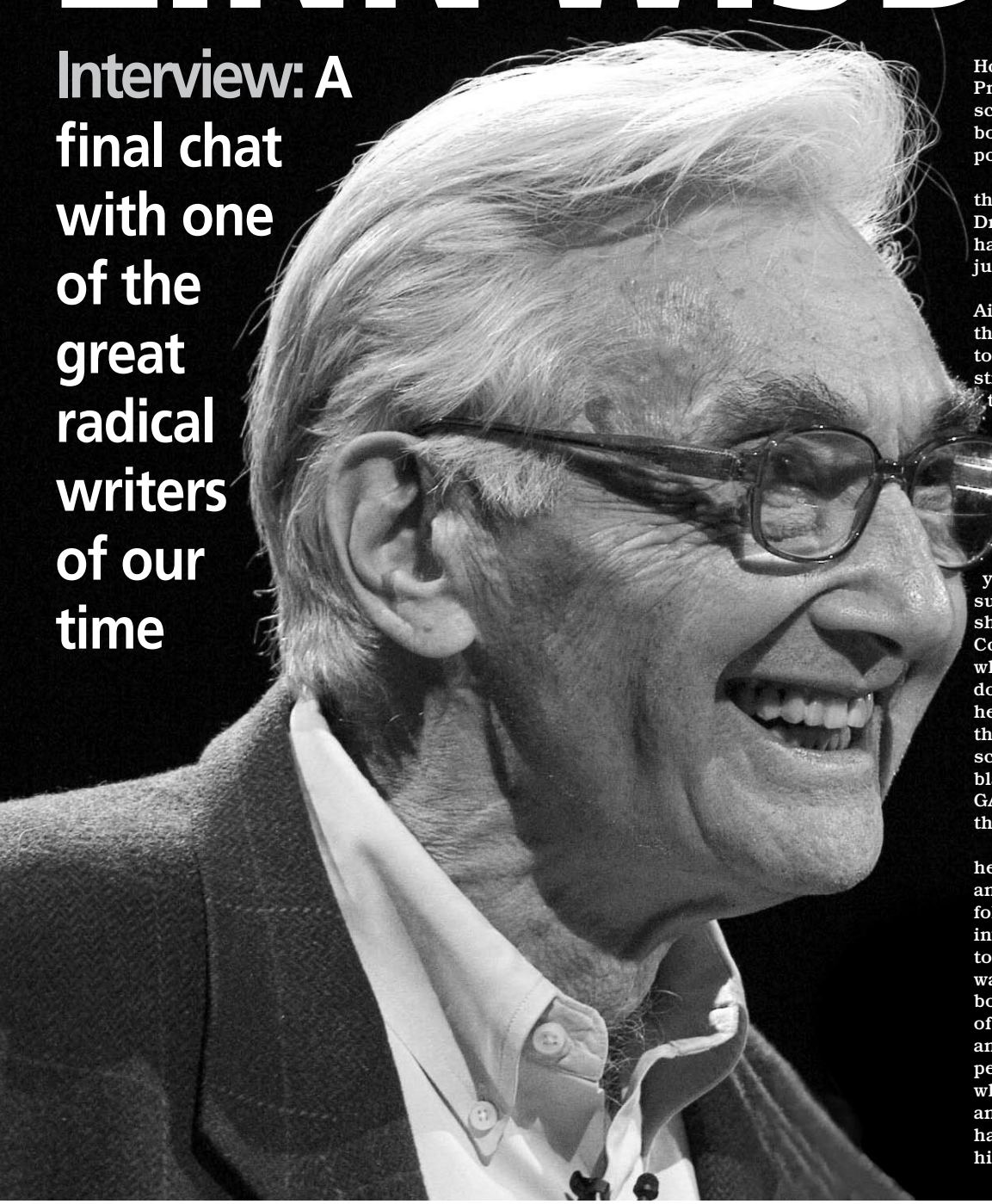
- The right to public services shouldn t depend on systematic robbery of working class people of their income
- Any oppressive law or measure can be defied and defeated by mass non-cooperation
- Grass roots self-organisation with mass public support can be inspirational and an unstoppable force for change
- The right to protest can be defended
- Radical ideas and ways of working do not need to be marginal, but can be mainstream and a real alternative to electoral politics

There is also the power of collective folk-memory, even across six centuries, that an unjust measure can be beaten. That demonstrates the importance of celebrating our radical history.

By Alan Woodward

ZINN WISDOM

Interview: A final chat with one of the great radical writers of our time



Howard Zinn (1922-2010) was a Professor Emeritus of political science at Boston University. He was born in Brooklyn, NY, in 1922 to a poor immigrant family.

He realised early in his youth that the promise of the "American Dream" sold as the reward for all hard-working and diligent people, is just that — a promise and a dream.

During world war two he joined US Air Force and served as a bombardier in the "European Theatre". This proved to be a formative experience that only strengthened his convictions that there is no such thing as a just war. It also revealed, once again, the real face of the socio-economic order, where the suffering and sacrifice of the ordinary people is always used only to higher the profits of the privileged few.

Although Zinn spent his youthful years helping his parents support the family by working in the shipyards, he started with studies at Columbia University after the war, where he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation in 1958. Later he was appointed as a chairman of the department of history and social sciences at Spelman College, an all-black women's college in Atlanta, GA, where he actively participated in the Civil Rights Movement.

From the onset of the Vietnam War he was active within the emerging anti-war movement, and in the following years only stepped up his involvement in movements aspiring towards another, better world. Zinn was the author of more than 20 books, including A People's History of the United States, "a brilliant and moving history of the American people from the point of view of those who have been exploited politically and economically and whose plight has been largely omitted from most histories…" (Library Journal).

From the 1980s onwards we have seen a process of economic globalisation – how so you think the left should react?

I am an anarchist, and according to anarchist principles nation states become obstacles to a true humanistic globalisation. In a certain sense, the movement towards globalisation where capitalists are trying to leap over nation state barriers, creates a kind of opportunity for movement to ignore national barriers, and to bring people together globally, across national lines in opposition to globalisation of capital, to create globalisation of people, opposed to traditional notion of globalisation. In other words to use globalisation—there is nothing wrong with idea of globalisation—in a way that bypasses national boundaries and of course that there is not involved corporate control of the economic decisions that are made about people all over the world.

Where do you see life after or beyond (nation) states?

Beyond the nation states? (laughter) I think what lies beyond the nation states is a world without national boundaries, but also with people organised.

But not organised as nations, but people organised as groups, as collectives, without national and any kind of boundaries. Without any kind of borders, passports, visas. None of that!

Of collectives of different sizes, depending on the function of the collective, having contacts with one another.

You cannot have self-sufficient little collectives, because these collectives have different resources available to them. This is something anarchist theory has not worked out and maybe cannot possibly work out in advance, because it would have to work itself out in practice.

Can change can be achieved through party politics, or only through other means?

If you work through the existing structures you are going to be corrupted. By working through political system that poisons the atmosphere, even the progressive organisations, you can see it even now in the US, where people on the "Left" are all caught in the electoral campaign and get into fierce arguments about should we support this third party candidate or that third party candidate.

This is a sort of little piece of evidence that suggests that when you get into working through electoral politics you begin to corrupt your ideals. So I think a way to behave is to think not in terms of

representative government, not in terms of voting, not in terms of electoral politics, but thinking in terms of organising social movements, organising in the work place, organising in the neighborhood, organising collectives that can become strong enough to eventually take over —first to become strong enough to resist what has been done to them by authority, and second, later, to become strong enough to actually take over the institutions.

Do you vote?

I do. Sometimes, not always. It depends. But I believe that it is preferable sometimes to have one candidate rather another candidate, while you understand that that is not the solution. Sometimes the lesser evil is not so lesser, so you want to ignore that, and you either do not vote or vote for third party as a protest against the party system.

Sometimes the difference between two candidates is an important one in the immediate sense, and then I believe trying to get somebody into office, who is a little better, who is less dangerous, is understandable. But never forgetting that no matter who gets into office, the crucial question is not who is in office, but what kind of social movement do you have.

Because we have seen historically that if you have a powerful social movement, it doesn't matter who is in office. Whoever is in office, they could be Republican or Democrat, if you have a powerful social movement, the person in office will have to yield, will have to in some ways respect the power of social movements.

We saw this in the 1960s. Richard Nixon was not the lesser evil, he was the greater evil, but in his administration the war was finally brought to an end, because he had to deal with the power of the anti-war movement as well as the power of the Vietnamese movement. I will vote, but always with a caution that voting is not crucial and organising is the important thing.

When some people ask me about voting, they would say will you support this candidate or that candidate? I say: "I will support this candidate for one minute that I am in the voting booth. At that moment I will support A versus B, but before I am going to the voting booth, and after I leave the voting booth, I am going to concentrate on organising people and not organising electoral campaign."

Anarchism is in this respect opposing representative democracy as a tyranny of the majority. Do you agree with this?

Absolutely. Rousseau once said, if I am part of a group of 100 people, do 99 people have the right to sentence me to death, just because they are a majority? No, majorities can be wrong, majorities can overrule rights of minorities. If majorities ruled, we could still have slavery. 80% of the population once enslaved 20% of the population. While run by majority rule is ok, that is a very flawed notion of what democracy is. Democracy has to take into account several things—proportionate requirements of people, not just needs of the majority, but also needs of the minority. And also has to take into account that majority, especially in societies where the media manipulates public opinion, can be totally wrong and evil. So yes, people have to act according to conscience and not by majority vote.

Where do you see the historical origins of anarchism in the US?

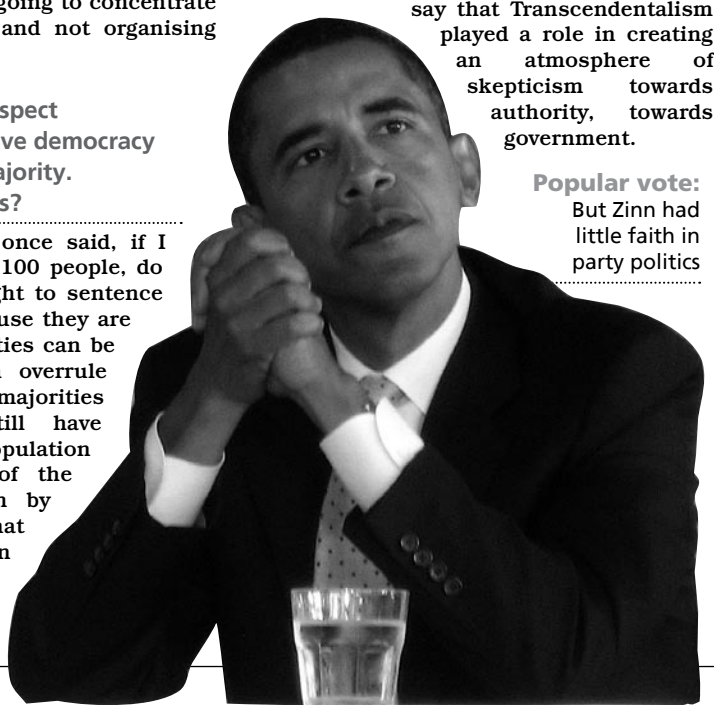
One of the problems with dealing with anarchism is that there are many people whose ideas are anarchist, but who do not necessarily call themselves anarchists. The word was first used by Proudhon in the middle of the 19th century, but actually there were anarchist ideas that proceeded Proudhon, those in Europe and also in the United States. For instance, there are some ideas of Thomas Paine, who was not an anarchist, who would not call himself an anarchist, but he was suspicious of government.

Also Henry David Thoreau. He does not know the word anarchism, and does not use the word anarchism, but Thoreau's ideas are very close to anarchism. He is very hostile to all forms of government. If we trace origins of anarchism in the United States, then probably Thoreau is the closest you can come to an early American anarchist.

You do not really encounter anarchism until after the Civil War, when you have European anarchists, especially German anarchists, coming to the United States. They actually begin to organise. The first time that anarchism has an organised force and becomes publicly known in the United States is in Chicago at the time of Haymarket Affair.

What is the main inspiration of contemporary US anarchism? What do you think about Transcendentalism?

Well, Transcendentalism is, we might say, an early form of anarchism. The Transcendentalists also did not call themselves anarchists, but there are anarchist ideas in their thinking and in their literature. In many ways Herman Melville shows some of those anarchist ideas. They were all suspicious of authority. We might say that Transcendentalism played a role in creating an atmosphere of skepticism towards authority, towards government.



Popular vote: But Zinn had little faith in party politics

Unfortunately, today there is no real organised anarchist movement in the United States. There are many important groups or collectives that call themselves anarchist, but they are small.

I remember that in 1960s there was an anarchist collective here in Boston that consisted of 15 people, but then they split. But in 1960s the idea of anarchism became more important in connection with the movements of 1960s.

Anarchism is a major source of creative energy in politics today, but most don't want to identify with it. Why?

The term anarchism has become associated with two phenomena with which real anarchists don't want to associate themselves with. One is violence, and the other is disorder or chaos. The popular conception of anarchism is on the one hand bomb-throwing and terrorism, and on the other hand no rules, no regulations, no discipline, everybody does what they want, confusion, etc. That is why there is a reluctance to use the term anarchism. But actually the ideas of anarchism are incorporated in the way the movements of the 1960s began to think.

I think that probably the best manifestation of that was in the civil rights movement with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—SNCC.

SNCC without knowing about anarchism as philosophy embodied the characteristics of anarchism. They were decentralised. Other civil rights organisations, for example Southern Christian Leadership Conference, were centralised organisations with a leader—Martin Luther King. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were based in New York, and also had some kind of centralised organisation.

SNCC, on the other hand, was totally decentralised. It had what they called field secretaries, who worked in little towns all over the South, with great deal of autonomy. They had an office in Atlanta, Georgia, but the office was not a strong centralised authority. The people who were working out in the field—in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi—they were very much on their own. They were working together with local people, with grassroots people. And so there is no one leader for SNCC, and also great suspicion of government.

They could not depend on government to help them, to support them, even though the government of the time, in the early 1960s, was considered to be progressive, liberal. John F Kennedy especially. But they looked at John F Kennedy, they saw how he behaved. John F Kennedy was not supporting the southern movement for equal rights for black people.

He was appointing the segregationists judges in the South, he was allowing southern segregationists to do whatever they wanted to do.

So SNCC was decentralised, anti-government, without leadership, but they did not have a vision of a future society like the anarchists. They were not thinking long term, they were not asking what kind of society shall we have in the future. They were really concentrated on immediate problem of racial segregation. But their attitude, the way they worked, the way they were organised, was along, you might say,

anarchist lines.

Do you think the misusage of the word anarchism is to do with its commitment to freedom?

No doubt! No doubt that anarchist ideas are frightening to those in power. People in power can tolerate liberal ideas. They can tolerate ideas that call for reforms, but they cannot tolerate the idea that there will be no state, no central authority. So it is very important for them to ridicule the idea of anarchism to create this impression of anarchism as violent and chaotic. It is useful for them, yes.

Do you agree with the separation of collectivist and individualist anarchism?

To me this is an artificial separation. As so often happens analysts can make things easier for themselves, like to create categories and fit movements into categories, but I don't think you can do that. Here in the United States, sure there have been people who believed in individualist anarchism, but in the United States have also been organised anarchists of Chicago in 1880s or SNCC. I guess in both instances, in Europe and in the United States, you find both manifestations, except that maybe in Europe the idea of anarcho-syndicalism became stronger in Europe than in the US. While in the US you have the IWW, which is an anarcho-syndicalist organisation and certainly not in keeping with individualist anarchism.

What is your opinion on the "dilemma" of means – revolution versus reform?

I think here are several different questions. One of them is the issue of violence, and I think here anarchists have disagreed. Here in the US you find a disagreement, and you can find this disagreement within one person. Emma Goldman, you might say she brought anarchism, after she was dead, to the forefront in the US in the 1960s, when she suddenly became an important figure.

Emma Goldman was in favor of the assassination of Henry Clay Frick, but then she decided that this is not the way. Her friend and comrade, Alexander Berkman, he did not give up totally the idea of violence. On the other hand, you have people who were anarchistic in a way like Tolstoy and also Gandhi, who believed in nonviolence.

There is one central characteristic of anarchism on the matter of means, and that central principle is a principle of direct action – of not going through the forms that the society offers you, of representative government, of voting, of legislation, but directly taking power. In case of trade unions, in the case of anarcho-syndicalism, it means workers going on strike, and not just that, but actually also taking hold of industries in which they work and managing them. What is direct action? In the South when black people were organising against racial segregation, they did not wait for the government to give them a signal, or to go through the courts, to file lawsuits, wait for Congress to pass the legislation. They took direct action; they went into restaurants, were sitting down there and wouldn't move. They got on those buses and acted out the situation that they wanted to exist.

Of course, strike is always a form of direct action. With the strike, too, you are not asking government to make things easier for you by passing legislation, you are taking a direct action against the employer. I would say, as far as means go, the idea of direct action against the evil that you want to overcome is a kind of common denominator for anarchist ideas, anarchist movements. I still think one of the most important principles of anarchism is that you cannot separate means and ends. And that is, if your end is egalitarian society you have to use egalitarian means, if your end is non-violent society without war, you cannot use war to achieve your end. I think anarchism requires means and ends to be in line with one another. I think this is in fact one of the distinguishing characteristics of anarchism.

Views diverged: Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman

Do you you feel left intellectuals are losing too much energy with theoretical disputes?

I think it is worth presenting ideas, like Michael Albert did with parecon [democratically-guided economics] for instance, even though if you maintain flexibility. We cannot create blueprint for future society now, but I think it is good to think about that. I think it is good to have in mind a goal.

It is constructive, it is helpful, it is healthy, to think about what future society might be like, because then it guides you somewhat what you are doing today, but only so long as this discussions about future society don't become obstacles to working towards this future society.

Otherwise you can spend discussing this utopian possibility versus that utopian possibility, and in the mean time you are not acting in a way that would bring you closer to that.

What is your opinion on attempts to scientifically prove Bakunin's assertion that humans have a biological need for freedom?

Actually I believe in this idea, but I think that you cannot have biological evidence for this. You would have to find a gene for freedom? No.

I think the other possible way is to go by history of human behavior. History of human behavior shows this desire for freedom, shows that whenever people have been living under tyranny, people would rebel against that.

In A People's History of the United States you show us that our freedoms, rights etc have never been given to us by the elite, but have always been won by ordinary people – with civil disobedience. What should be in this respect our first steps toward another, better world?

I think our first step is to organise ourselves and protest against existing order—against war, against economic and sexual exploitation, against racism, etc.

But to organise ourselves in such a way that means correspond to the ends, and to organise ourselves in such a way as to create kind of human relationship that should exist in future society.

That would mean to organise ourselves without centralise authority, without charismatic leader, in a way that represents in miniature the ideal of the future egalitarian society.

So that even if you don't win some victory tomorrow or next year in the meantime you have created a model. You have acted out how future society should be and you created immediate satisfaction, even if you have not achieved your ultimate goal.

■ *Ziga Vodovnik is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, where his teaching and research is focused on anarchist theory/praxis and social movements in the Americas.*

By Zida Vodovdnik

How the heart was

Review: Alan Woodward is touched by a lament for the Royal Mail which says it all about business

Dear Granny Smith – a letter from your postman
Mayall, Roy.
Short Books. 2009.
Paperback. 120pp.
£4.99
ISBN: 9781906021979.

This timely book, conveniently published in envelop size, gives the inside story from a postal worker about whats happening to a major public service and the reasons why posties have been taking one day strikes over the last five months of 2009.

Its outline of working conditions is quite unusual and is a thorough account of the present Government and Royal Mails offensive against ordinary workers.

The title uses the posties' own term for the public and pulls no punches, being written in workshop language and presenting a a totally devastating critique of the management's inflammatory commercial approach.

The author uses a pen name but has apparently been a working postman for some years. Whoever wrote the eleven chapters, it is an imaginative, well constructed book and at £4.99, it is an absolute bargain.

As the blurb says, postal workers have a pet name for their customers.

It's "Granny Smith" a name that calls to mind every old lady who lives alone and for whom the mail service is a lifeline.

The title is taken from yet another management meeting calling to announce to staff some further details of 2009's proposed modernisation changes.

Someone piped up in the middle of it: "What about Granny Smith?" He's an old-fashioned sort of postman, the kind who cares about these things. "Granny Smith is not important," was the reply. "Granny Smith doesn't matter any more."

Roy Mayall gives reasons for the industrial action including a consideration for all the Grannie Smiths and the book is likely to help swing the public behind the postal workers once and for all. Its exposure of corporate dominance is as relevant as it is timely in an election year.

The book is written in a conversational style, with some workplace humour that sometimes approaches being crude and the anonymous postie is blunt in his message about reversing the adoption of commercial values.

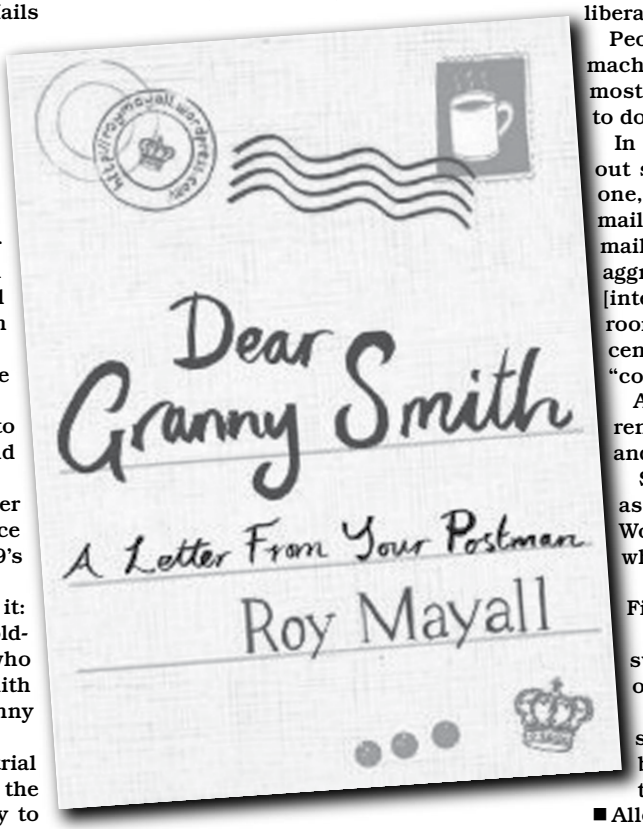
All this subversion was edited out by the BBC when the book was serialised on Radio 4 as Book of the Week in December 2009, but will ring a bell with anyone who went to the picket line during the dispute.

With its rotas, barbeques and careful monitoring of persons allegedly going into work, the strike, like the book, was a well organised and successful one.

The two main themes of the text are the degradation of working conditions and Royal Mail's market-inspired transition from an efficient public service into a shambolic and inefficient business enterprise.

The first theme would be familiar to anyone concerned with the condition of the working class – it has been their constant companion for the best part of two centuries.

The author describes in detail and with some bitter humour how well-established workplace practices have been replaced with crackbrained schemes, designed it seems with just proving that the current management are in charge.



Or so they like to think.

Roy Mayall tells how the impracticality of the new technology-based modernisation has ground to a halt in all its essential features – address reading machines, replacing bikes with cumbersome electric trolleys, the Starburst strategy of bulk delivery teams and suchlike.

Mech-ed mail machine sorting of the mail has fallen from a target of over 80% to 50% and that just the official figures.

What has not failed is the re-organisation of work, the consistent bullying, the abolition of even the smallest amount of free time, the extremely authoritarian Attendance Procedures that force even quite ill people into work on threat of dismissal, and such like.

You may say there's nothing new about all that. Everyone knows that there is no democracy in our totalitarian workplaces and as an ancient political commentator remarked the only true wealth is time – the point is that all these processes are cunningly hidden by the alliance of the politicals, management and most of the media.

Once again blame is shifted onto the victims: "The posties are being obstructive."

Now old timers may recall the promises of 30 years ago that new technology would liberate society.

People would work for only a few hours, machines would do the heavy toil and their most onerous task would be deciding what to do with our leisure.

In reality Roy Mayall describes taking out six bags of mail each day instead of one, a huge increase of junk advertising mail despite the lying assurances that mail levels are falling, constant and aggressive management interviews, [interrogation more like], and the leisure room turned into a management lecture centre for open propaganda sessions or "corporate drivel," as he calls it.

All this is done in the interests of renewed capitalism by Thatcher, Blair and Brown – can you tell them apart?

Small wonder the political confusion as the leaders of the Communication Workers Union try to boost Labour while the members revolt.

And we havent even mentioned the Final Agreement.

This brings us to the second theme, switching over from public to private ownership.

I have described above the new slavery, posties too tired to do anything but work and sleep. Everyone knows the management strategy:

- Allow pension holidays for management, but not workers, so that the pension fund is deeply in debt,
- Hound out the full timers ,
- Bring in part timers and casuals,
- Reduce the enterprise to the point of collapse to make a private take over seem like salvation because There Is No Alternative.

The author gives chapter and verse about the public service ethos. How posties have a social role, just like the hospital cleaners who were abolished for disease spreading contractors, and who as part of the community, are useful contributors.

Reporting domestic ill health. helping out pensioners, transmitting information, monitoring temporarily empty houses, acting as a counsellor and so on.

But today Grannie Smith doesnt matter,

torn from the post

the needs of the corporate bodies take first, second and all places.

Despite the record of these companies – it should be remembered it was their failure that caused the pre-Thatcher society to be built in the first place – the private sector dominates both industry and wider society.

The complicated process of privatisation has been well-publicised recently but what is less well known is "creeping commercialisation."

Take downstream access, which allows private companies to select out any part of the process which it thinks profitable and privatise it.

It is already used by operators like TNT, but the use of this "surrender to profit" scheme has now appeared in the NHS.

Clinicenta, despite some appalling performances is still allowed to cherry pick and make money from its "choice."

The leadership seems passive in various unions and allows this insidious practice to continue. Once again it's down to the rank and file.

Another feature is the use of language, a key factor as Orwell noted.

Here "modernisation" means privatisation, more speed up, no job security, all casual labour, poverty wages.

"Flexibility" means obeying instructions however absurd.

Management "discretion" in fact means mandatory actions.

"Public Service" means total subordination to corporate objectives.

"Attendance" means absenting yourself from medical attention,

"Mail sort" means junk mail or around two thirds of the total and so on. Royal Mail management have nothing to learn from 1984.

The recent international financial crisis should, in an ideal world, have demolished the credentials of the free market.

There is little evidence that this has happened, and even less that the political leaders have any intention of changing course.

For them, No Alternative exists, so they press ahead with cosmetic reforms while keeping the pressure on the rest of us in the same old way.

Mayall is quite clear about the consequences, in terms of blame for general issues, of the central role of the market.

To an extent he also implicates the union for losing sight of the social aims of the labour movement in pursuit of the free market.

While his affection for old Labour may be exaggerated – remember George Brown and Harold Wilson – his basic sentiments ring quite true.

He ends with a tale where an old person in a future world that is totally commercial describes the Royal Mail set up as it used to be to an obviously incredulous audience.

The McMail option he calls it. but as he also says, its not too late to save it, though prospects under Cameron, Brown and co do seem bleak.

Generally the text has no overall political message, despite his reference to the gods of wealth and economics .

He doesnt waste ink either on the alternative promises of The Revolutionary Party any more than conventional politicians. His memories of old Labour are likely to be illusory but his demolition of the present institutions and their scurrilous roles is complete.

As he says "my tale is of loss and deceit, anger and despair, and the wanton destruction of an ancient and venerable organisation."

It seem likely that no one has told him of the libertarian philosophy and in particular the idea of workers' control of the workplace, then society.

This idea is implicit however in his critique of management and politicians – the workers can manage the place quite well on their own but the political implications are missing. This is a deep-seated problem and one which the conscious minority has been slow in tackling.

Finally, this is a unique publication.

There were some examples of solidarity from other workers in the long dispute. Drivers and service workers refusing to cross picket lines and some workplace money collections, though the strike leaders gave this a low priority.

What of the future? The 2007 strike was followed by the 2009 one, as management kept on with its predetermined free market strategy – "modernisation" at all costs.

At present as management press on with their only delayed plans, we can expect more conflict and picket lines.

Labour intends continuing to worship the gods that have failed – be prepared for more early rising.

Ongoing attacks: A closure notice from the 2007 postal strike. Picture: Adrian Short

By Alan Woodward

Hob's Choice

Welcome once again to Hob's Choice, our regular pamphlet mini-review feature. It is good to see that the fine revolutionary tradition of radical pamphleteering is thriving. For this issue we have been overwhelmed with a wide range of pamphlets. Due to space restrictions we have had to hold some over to the next issue, so profuse apologies to publishers. In this issue thanks go out to the following: Anarchist Federation, Past Tense Publications, Gorter Press, Kate Sharpley Library and the Commune.

Against Nationalism. Pub. Anarchist Federation (Anarchist Communist Editions). 2009. A5 format. 32pp. £2 (payable, 'Anarchist Federation'). BM Anafed, London, WC1N 3XX. www.afed.org.uk

In this pamphlet the AF clearly state their class struggle internationalist position. The initial inspiration behind this pamphlet was born out of leftist support for the various reactionary, warring anti-working class factions in the Middle East. As anarchist communists, the AF has always held a strong anti-nationalist perspective. It was deemed appropriate to restate this in pamphlet form.

This relatively short pamphlet covers the concept of nation and nationalism; the origins of nationalism; why anarchists oppose nationalism (reprinted elsewhere in Black Flag); the left and the "national question;" national liberation struggles; nation states and imperialism and "after nationalism." It is a fine piece of work and is nationally endorsed by the AF.

Origins of the Movement for Workers Councils in Germany. Pub. Anarchist Federation (AF Manchester/Peterloo Press). 2009. A5 format. 28pp. £2. Details as above. www.af-north.org

This is another, albeit valuable, reprint of the original Dutch pamphlet published in 1938. The text is an important political and historical document. It describes and analyses the revolution in Germany following world war one, the political organisations, the mass workers movement and the nature of workers councils at the time.

The motive for republishing at this time is summed up in the preface: "We still find the experiences of the workers in Germany from November 1918 onwards a source of inspiration. We do not want their struggles and sacrifices to be forgotten by a new generation who are continuing the same struggle they fought." A sentiment I cannot disagree with. Classic work. Always recommended.

Battleground: The Ford plant in Belfast, which was occupied last year. Picture: desomurchu

Leninism or Communism. Gilles Dauvé. Pub. Anarchist Federation (AF Manchester/Peterloo Press). 2009. A5 format. 20pp. £1.50. Details as above.

Originally written under the pseudonym Jean Barrot and published by the Wildcat Group in the early 1980's. Leninism or Communism is an attempt to demystify events surrounding the 'mythology' of the Russian revolution and the nature of the Bolsheviks. Sound analysis of a still very important subject and, I would suggest, of relevance to the ongoing struggle of today. Further texts from Wildcat and related groups Solidarity and Subversion can be accessed via the Anarchist Federation.

May 1968: Spot The Workers Autonomy: Pub. Past Tense. 2009. A4 format. 54pp. £2. (payable, 'Past Tense Publications' + 70p p&p one item + 30p thereafter per publication). c/o 56a infoshop, 56 Crampton Street, London SE17 3AE.

Originally published in French by Mouvement Communiste. This is a timely and welcome English translation which aims to clarify the myths and reality surrounding the events of 1968 in France. The blurb states: "In many ways the myth of the revolt, its images and slogans, have defined ideas about revolution, at least in "developed western democracies." It has also been used to sell both large volumes of hip capitalist merchandise and many alleged left alternatives to capitalism." It questions the role of the Communist Party and the unions and includes first hand accounts from activists and strikers (allegedly 10million went on strike). The pamphlet also includes a useful and informative introduction from the Past Tense collective, which amongst other things, draws parallels with the British general strike of 1926.

A Post-Fordist Struggle: Report & Reflections on the 2009 UK Ford-Visteon Dispute. Pub. Past Tense 2009. A5 format. 26pp. 50p. Details as above.

This pamphlet is a longer version of an article written for Wildcat (Germany) on the 2009 occupations of Ford plants in Belfast, Basildon and Enfield. Written from a class-struggle perspective, it features the story of both activists and workers involved in the dispute, in their struggle against both bosses and trade union bureaucrats; as well as a scathing criticism of leftist groups who 'supported' the occupations. It also notes the fact that thousands turned out for the G20 protests yet rarely more than 300 turned out to support the Visteon occupation.

■ *Other titles received from Past Tense include pamphlets on local radical history: Clerkenwell Scorcher: Notes for a Clerkenwell Radical History Walk and Rights of Common: The Fight Against the Theft of Sydenham Common and One Tree Hill. 50p each plus p&p.*

Ford Visteon Enfield Workers Occupation: An Eye Witness Account and First Thoughts. Alan Woodward. Pub. Gorter Press. 2009. A5 format. 58pp. £3. (payable, 'F.A. Woodward'). c/o PO Box 45155, London, N15 4SL.

Another valuble account of the Ford-Visteon dispute from someone who was there – a spritely 70-year-old pensioner who supported the occupying workers throughout, and kept a daily diary! Nicely complements the Past Tense title A Post-Fordist Struggle.

Life and Times of Joe Thomas : The Road to Libertarian Socialism. Alan Woodward. Pub. Gorter Press: A Libertarian Socialists Publication. 2009. A5 format. 40pp. £1. Details as above.

Joe Thomas (1912-1990) was quite a character and I had the pleasure of meeting him on a number of occasions, so it is a special treat to read this pamphlet. He joined the Communist Party in 1937 and over the next 20 years or so he moved to what could be described as a libertarian socialist position. He was involved, in modern history, that is, my political life-time, with groups such as Workers Voice, Social Revolution, Solidarity, London Workers' Group and the Movement for Workers Councils. From the late 70's onwards, it was at the meetings of the latter two, and on the News International picket lines in Wapping in 1986 that I met him.

The pamphlet also includes an updated version of the old Solidarity booklet As We See It, entitled As We See It Now by the Libertarian Socialists Group.

The Deeper Meaning of Struggle: An Outline History of the International Shop Stewards Movement and Socialism. Alan Woodward. Pub. Gorter Press: A Libertarian Socialists Publication. 2009. A5 format. 64pp. £1. Details as above.

This pamphlet is not quite what the title suggests. The actual history of the Shop Stewards Movement is only a part of it. It presents a general overview of what could be best described as libertarian socialist workplace organisation; covering councils, auxiliary councils, federations, sub-committees, workers militias, syndicalism as well as linking the Shop Stewards Movement into the wider libertarian picture. To be perfectly honest, although it contains some very interesting facts, I found this pamphlet a little bit all over the place.

You Anarchist You! Ernestan. Illustrated by Richard Warren. Pub. Kate Sharpley Library. 2009. A5 format. 26pp. £3. (payable, 'Kate Sharpley Library'). BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX.

Written by Belgian anarchist Ernest Tanrez, in the two-way conversational style of Errico Malatesta, under the pen-name Ernestan and first published in Paris circa 1948. You Anarchist, You! is the conversation between two workers who are friends, one an anarchist and the other a potential recruit to the cause. Meeting on a picket line, Frank and Pete, (originally Francois and Pierre) discuss anarchism, politics and the meaning of life. The pamphlet also contains a series of cartoons by Richard Warren and a biography of Tanrez by Nick Heath.

After Makhno: Hidden Histories of Anarchism in the Ukraine. Anatoly V. Dubovik. Pub. Kate Sharpley Library. 2009. A5 format. 22pp. £3. Details as above.

This pamphlet contains two essays by Dubovik: The Anarchist Underground in the Ukraine in the 20's and 30's and The Story of a Leaflet and the Fate of the Anarchist Varshavskiy.

After Makhno escaped from the Soviet Union in 1921 many assume that this was the end of anarchist resistance to the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine.

However, as this pamphlet points out this was far from the truth. In fact, resistance continued well into the 1930's; with documented cases of ex-Makhnovists been sentenced to death as late as 1938.

In the second essay, the leaflet in question was written by Moscow based anarchists in 1927 against the trial and treatment of Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States, as well as criticising the Bolshevik government for championing the case, while incarcerating anarchist comrades in the USSR.

Storming Heaven: The Paris Commune of 1871. Pub. The Commune. 2009. A4 format. 16pp. £1. (payable, 'The Commune'). The Commune, 2nd Floor, 145-157 St John Street, London EC1V 4PY.

This is pamphlet number eight from the Commune containing two essays and is part of their working class and revolutionary theory and practice educational programme.

The first is a reprint of Solidarity Pamphlet 35; which is a response to 'left' critics of the Paris Commune, in particular Trotsky; which also draws parallels with the uprising in Hungary in 1956.The second is Karl Marx's account of the commune from his work Civil War in France.

My main criticism of this pamphlet is the poor quality production – A4 80gsm paper with stapled sheets which fall apart almost straight away – no excuses these days for shoddy pamphleteering!

Not the end: Resistance to the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine continued into the 1930s.

■ *Publishers are invited to submit newly published or recent pamphlets for a mini-review. Each review will include publishing details and content summary. Comprehensive book reviews will continue to be published elsewhere in Black Flag.*

By Ade Dimmick

The debateable state

Review response: Alan Woodward has plenty to add to the issue of council communism's roots

Non-Leninist Marxism: Writings on the Worker's Councils
By Gorter, Pannekoek, Pankhurst, Rühl
Pub. Red and Black Publishers 2007
ISBN 978-0-9791813-6-8
Paperback. 173pp
Price £6.25

Ade Dimmick's review of this book (BF 228 – Liberal Apocalypse issue) seems to me to be an excellent critique and I would endorse all the points made therein. These include his points about

- The imbalance of writers,
- The inappropriate selection of articles, and so on.

In particular I was pleased to see the section on Sylvia Pankhurst after so many biographies that just ignore her contribution on this subject.

Secondly the selection of Hermann Gorter's famous and frequently printed rebuttal of Lenin merely adds to the total, whereas his crucial booklet on The Organisation of the Proletariat's Class Struggle is long out of print.

It is only available in a book of readings of both himself and Pannekoek [Smart]. This would have been the logical choice.

However, I look forward to any further publications which add to the overall total.

However I do have one complaint. Can workers' council communism be presented, as the title suggests, as a branch of non-leninist marxism?

After all there is practically no mention in the unascribed introduction of other sources or perspectives.

There is on the other hand a constant stream of articles and books which come from the "marxism" school, implicitly endorsed by the present book, or rather its publishers Red and Black.

I differ from this view and would see workers' councils as very much more than that. I would argue that that there are three main sources for our subject – marxism, libertarianism and workplace organisation.

On the first of these we can acknowledge the importance of revolutionary, mainly German, oppositional Marxism which proposed the workers' take-over of society, unlike reformists and authoritarian socialists like the Bolsheviks.

The Polish marxist Rosa Luxemburg was perhaps the leader of this element and in the middle of the German revolutionary situation in 1918 proposed the replacement of parliament by a workers' political organisation based on councils [Riddell].

Earlier she had voiced her criticism of both the moderate compliant and nationalist Labour leaders, and a big segment of Bolshevik theory and practice. [Cliff, 1959]

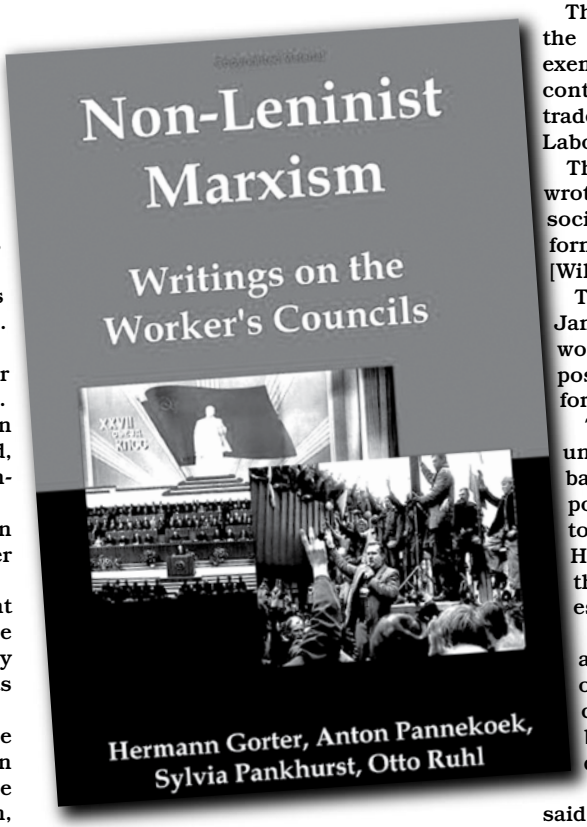
After her murder by the German Labour Party leaders her mantle on the new left was assumed by the previously Leninist Anton Pannekoek and Hermann Gorter.

With a long tradition of resistance in both Holland and Germany, the two developed their view of the ideas of council communism.

This had been originally proposed after the 1905 revolution in East Europe and they were the key people in advocating it up to their deaths in 1960 and 1927 respectively.

Like all political leaders, they made mistakes, but their re-statement of socialism and its implications were the backbone of the movement. [Gorter]

The text already deals with the Marxist element but before passing on, it would be worthwhile to remind ourselves of how much Leninism represented a direct negative of socialism. Lenin, aided by Trotsky, eliminated the workers' control element in the Russian revolution in 1917/8 by:



- rejecting outright the national Central Council of Factory and Shop Committee's plan for a new society, and an amended version.
- bringing in a very weak Decree on Workers' Control despite stiff opposition, more a plan for consultation in reality,
- negating the workers' own Practical Manual For The Implementation Of Workers Control Of Industry by instructions in a Counter Manual,
- amalgamating the workers' councils into party-controlled trade unions and other state bodies
- by-passing the Soviets – second layer of councils – with state institutions, up to the governmental Commissars at national level,
- imposing one-man management, and other techniques, in the workplace,
- overriding various decisions by workers' organisations,
- repressing workers and their organisations, most bloodily at Kronstadt in 1921.

This subject is dealt with quite comprehensively in Maurice Brinton's pioneering volume on the role of Leninism, The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control.

The second essential component is the organisation of workplace unionism exemplified by the shop stewards' movement, contrasting with the official national trade unions and their subordination to Labourism.

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote in 1919 that the embryo of future socialist society could be found in the form of working class organisations [Williams].

The erstwhile council socialist C L R James proclaimed that workers control of workplaces in the advanced world in the post WW2 period was already the model for socialism [James].

The mass organisations of labour – the unofficial workplace councils – are the basis of council socialism on which political structures are based, according to a major theorist of the subject [Murphy]. Hence a study of workplace unions as the pre figurative bodies of councils is an essential part.

The final element is to be found in anarchism and syndicalism's emphasis on local organisation and members' control over the delegates to higher bodies. Also we can include the use of direct action.

The libertarian contribution can be said to have begun with the establishment of permanent structures of the working class in the form of trade unions. One of the earliest references comes from the writings of the pioneering French anarchist P J Proudhon.

His perspective of workers control was prophetic and significant.

Proudhon adopted it in a specific form from the workers of Lyons after the 1840 insurrection. Its essential features were an overall association of labour and:

- every associated individual to have an indivisible share in the enterprise,
- each worker to take his share of heavy, dirty, or dangerous work, in the workplace and /or society,
- each to be trained for, and to do, all the operations of the workplace or industry,
- remuneration to be proportional to skill

# of non-leninist labels

and responsibility of the job,
- profits to be shared in proportion,
- each to be free to set his own hours, work as defined and leave the association at will,
- management and technicians to be elected, and work regulations to be subject to collective approval,
- office holders to be elected.

This contribution is examined in the writings of an ex-Marxist who attempts to relate the two ideologies and provides a comprehensive introduction to Russian, Italian and Spanish council movements. [Guerin]

Most of the ideas of industrial and political liberation can be implied from these statements, though Proudhon's strong opposition to strikes – the most likely means of achieving these – was just one of many contradictions in his theories.

The basic ideas above survived Marx's attempt to close down the First International of the Working Class and it had resisted much better than marxism the degeneration into parliamentarism and reformism. Before the first world war, it was the main ideology of the working class internationally, reflected in the strike waves in Europe. [Holton].

Anarcho-syndicalism was the leading political idea of these years. The anarchist concept of local control, through a system of federated liaison committees which was the practice then, is increasingly shown to be necessary.

No effective means has emerged within capitalist society to control the tendency to dominant centralised political control, and the actual autonomy of leaderships, in labour and political organisations. The idea of federation is essential, though sometimes difficult to comprehend, for the success of the revolutionary socialist project.

As well as its agitation for oppositional workplace organisation, its emphasis on personal responsibility and awareness of class was adopted by Pannekoek. anarchists were active in workers' committees in Russia, Italy, Germany, Britain, France and Spain in interwar period and later elsewhere. [Guerin] [Dolgoff]

We also need to note here that much workplace industrial action has been classified as direct action in the widest sense. Direct action, defined as the expression of strongly held personal beliefs that are not met by formal and official institutions, would include that part of industrial action which is not constitutional.

This is, in most circumstances, the clear majority. Another element of the link with libertarian politics.

The failures of Bolshevism have been examined above, briefly that it substitutes itself for the workers' organisation in both the preparation for, and the reconstruction after, the revolution. A different form of political organisation is needed,

However the form of socialism, based on the councils, rejects what it sees as the weakness of anarchism and its theories. This involves:
- the belief that a patchwork local workplace control is not just essential, but also sufficient on its own, for the revolution,
- the neglect of the political role of the capitalist state and the resulting need for a political structure, albeit based on a precautionary federalism,
- other contentious elements include the confusion over the role of work in society, the sufficiency of the general strike, approval of dual unions and the tendency to resort to acts of violence which still persist in some parts of anarchism,
- the incompleteness of anarchist theory over the crisis of the fascist threat, and the social capitulation to parliamentary reformism, as in Spain in 1936.

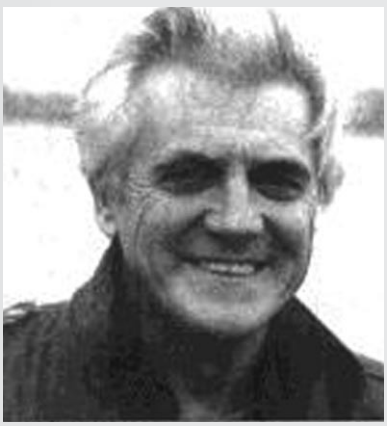
The first two of these points are examined extensively in Gorter's Political Organisation, mentioned above. In summary for this third section, libertarianism provided a substantial base, usually ignored by conventional and socialist historians to the council movement, but went beyond this source.

There is as yet no comprehensive volume of the origins, development and ideas of what used to be called council communism. This would probably be known as libertarian socialism in modern terms. The volume under review, I'm afraid, is a contribution to that but a qualified one.

Finally, it is part of the role of the reviewer to comment on all aspects of a publication. I should therefore mention that I could not get a copy of the book in any of the half dozen bookshops I tried, and had in the end to buy it on line from Amazon. It came very quickly from that source. It's worth the effort.

By Alan Woodward

Factfile: Reference and further reading



Authors: Above, Gwyn Williams. Below, David Goodway. Bottom right, Maurice Brinton

(By second name)

- Maurice Brinton: The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917-21 [1970, 86 pp] reprinted in Goodway;
- Tony Cliff: Rosa Luxemburg, [1959 first, unamended, edition, 90 pp];
- Sam Dolgoff editor: The Spanish Collectives – workers management in the Spanish Revolution 1936-39 [1990 Canada , 194 pp];
- David Goodway, editor : For Workers' Power – the selected writings of Maurice Brinton [2004, 379 pp];
- Herman Gorter: An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin [1921, 1995, 41 pp];
- Herman Gorter: The Organisation of the Proletariat's Class Struggle [1921 Germany, 23 pp] reprinted in Smart.
- Daniel Guerin: Anarchism – from theory to practice [1970, 166 pp] page 46;
- Bob Holton: British Syndicalism 1900-1914 [1976, 232 pp] ;
- CLR James, as JR Johnson, Grace C Lee and Pierre Chaulieu (Cornelius Castoriadis): Facing Reality: the new society, where to look for it , how to bring it closer, [1958 USA (listed under Lee ?), 174 pp].
- J T Murphy: The Workers' Committee – an outline of its principles and structure [1917 & 72, 26 pp];
- John Riddell, editor : The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet power [1986, 540 pp];
- D A Smart, ed: Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism [1978, 176 pp];
- Gwyne A Williams: Proletarian Order – Antonio Gramsci, factory councils and the origins of Italian communism 1911-21 [1975, 370 pp],
- Alan Woodward: Party Over Class; how Leninism has subverted workers' council organisation [2004 - second revised edition, 50 pp]

Confident of a future

Review: Malatesta's vision is a strong, clear reminder of what must be fought for in this world

Anarchy
Malatesta, Errico – Translated by Vernon Richards.
Freedom Press (new edition 2009).
Paperback: 64pp
£5.00
ISBN: 9780904491111

I must confess that I have often wondered if anarchists have chosen their name wisely or sensibly. Like the late 19th century socialist with anarchist sympathies Joseph Lane, for example, who published An Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto, I have sometimes thought it might be less frightening to describe oneself with a more positive sounding phrase such as "free communist" or maybe "libertarian socialist" or such like.

But the insurrectionary anarchist communist Errico Malatesta (1854 – 1932), a warm-hearted anarchist from southern Italy of widespread reputation and influence, had no such hang-ups. In his pamphlet of 1891 L'Anarchia he confidently and vigorously put the case for the positive adoption of the name anarchist, and for what the name represents.

He argues: "Those who say... that the anarchists have badly chosen their name because it is wrongly interpreted by the masses... are mistaken.

"The error does not come from the word but from the thing; and the difficulties anarchists face in their propaganda do not depend on the name they have taken, but on the fact that their concept clashes with all the public's long established prejudices on the function of government,"

Malatesta points out that that anarchists use the term in its original meaning; "The absence of government or authority." Rather than meaning disorder, Malatesta argues that it implies precisely social organisation.

"Such social organisation involves "the destruction of all political order based on authority, and the creation of a society of free and equal members based on a harmony of interests and the voluntary participation of everybody in carrying out social responsibilities."

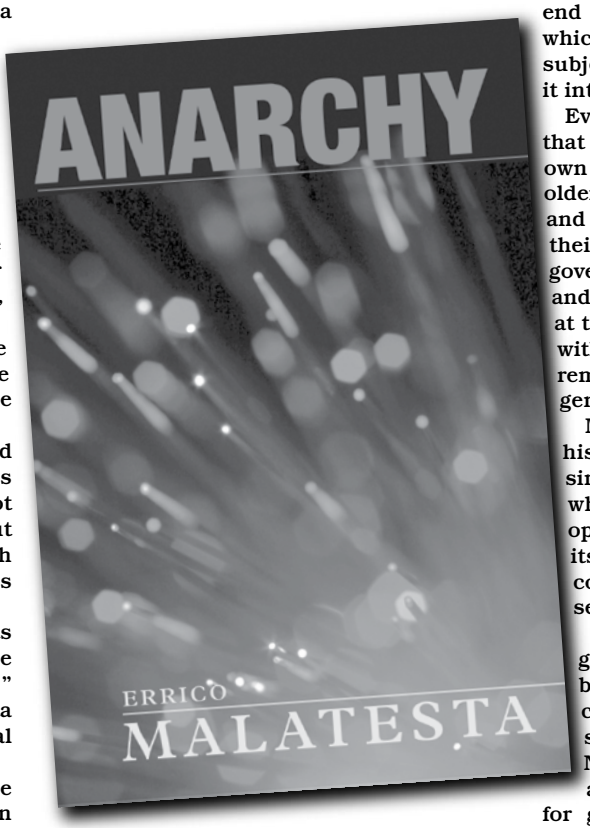
Hence the word had become adopted in Malatesta's time by a whole mass movement of struggle that considered such a social organisation of "complete freedom within complete solidarity" as both possible and desirable.

Much of Malatesta's writings consisted of short articles, gems of anarchist thought, each dealing briefly with particular themes and subject areas. The nine "chapters" of Malatesta's Anarchy were first used in their English translation as a series of articles in the anarchist periodical Freedom.

Chapters one and two are mainly introductory and deal with definitions and the meanings of terms, while raising polemical questions against authority and government. A harder political and economic critique starts in chapter three onwards. In fact much of the core arguement of the pamphlet can be found summed up in the chapter.

Authoritarian theoreticians will say that natural antagonisms of interests between people create the need for government and established authority, and that government is a necessary moderating influence in the social struggle.

But, in chapter three, Malatesta points



out that "... one knows only too well that in social economy too often are theories invented to justify the facts, that is to defend privilege and make it palatable to those who are its victims." He then goes on to refute the authoritarian arguement.

Malatesta starts by arguing that there are two basic ways of oppressing people, either directly by physical force, or indirectly by enslaving them by denying them free access to the means of life.

The former method is at the root of political power, the latter method was the origin of economic exploitative forms of property. People can also be suppressed ideologically, by religion for example, but this tends to work as a result of political and economic privilege in the first place.

Malatesta then goes on to describe a historic process by which simple early despotism and elitist rule by brute force, which had originally established domination by destroying customs of solidarity in sparsely populated primitive societies, were themselves displaced by the growing domination of a more sophisticated economic exploiting class: "Thus, in the shadow of power, for its protection and support, often unbeknown to it, and for reasons beyond its control, private wealth, that is the owning class, is developed.

And the latter, gradually concentrating in their hands the means of production... end up by establishing their own power which... always ends by more or less openly subjecting the political power, ... and making it into its own gendarme."

Eventually the capitalist class demands that government should arise from its own ranks, and it seeks to overthrow older aristocratic forms of government and replace them with governments of their own democratic choosing: "Today, government, consisting of property owners and people dependent on them, is entirely at the disposal of the owners..." and "even with universal suffrage... the government remained the bourgeoisie's servant and gendarme."

Maybe Malatesta's description of historical class development is a bit simplistic. It overlooks historic occasions when the older aristocratic power co-opted economic activity into spreading its own political domination, such as the cooption of pirate merchant activity into serving the imperial aims of the state.

It also fails to anticipate the massive growth in the 20th century of a modern bureaucratic class, for example, that can just as well serve the interests of state capital instead of private capital. Nonetheless Malatesta swiftly sweeps aside the theoretical justifications for government and gets straight to the point: "The basic function of government everywhere in all times,... is always that of oppressing and exploiting the masses, of defending the oppressors and the exploiters."

Of course, as Malatesta freely admits, government cannot survive long without hiding behind a mask of usefulness. It directs the building of schools and hospitals, and takes over the running of many public services. But, insists Malatesta, it always does this in order to dominate, and defend its privileges and those of the class it represents.

When it comes to the conflict between workers and their industrial employers Malatesta states that: "...governments, show a tendency to arbitrate in the dealings between master and workers: in this way they

free from our tyrants

seek to sidetrack the workers' movement and, with a few deceptive reforms, to prevent the poor from taking for themselves what is their due…"

Against the prevailing domination, hierarchy, and competition Malatesta counterpoises the law of solidarity. The influence of Kropotkin's Mutual Aid is obvious when Malatesta argues that living beings have two ways of surviving: "One is by individual struggle against the elements and against other individuals.., the other is by mutual aid by cooperation, which could also be described as association for the struggle…"

The struggle for survival itself gives rise to the development of strong social feeling and cooperation among humans which transforms human existence. Social life becomes the necessary environment for humans.

Outside of social life humans cannot live properly. Other animals fight against nature or each other individually or in small groups. But human struggle, argues Malatesta, instead always tends to widen the human association. It tends towards overcoming all the external forces of nature by humanity for humanity.

Within human societies the struggles between individuals grow into struggles between associations, sometimes associations to defend the advantages of privileged minorities against the mass and against each other, and increasingly with the solidarity and combinations of the workers association to defend the interests of more and more of humanity.

"This (solidarity) is the goal towards which human evolution advances; it is the higher principle which resolves all existing antagonism, … and results in the freedom of each not being limited by, but complemented… in the freedom of others."

"Today the immense development of production,…the means of communication,… science, literature, businesses and even wars, all have drawn humankind into an ever tighter single body whose constituent parts,… can only find fulfilment and freedom to develop through the well-being of the other constituent parts as well as of the whole."

According to Malatesta's anarchist communist argument, the doing away with government and property, and the triumph of solidarity in all human relationships is where cooperation should ultimately lead.

I might want to put this line of thinking to the test and ask some critical questions at this point. Is there perhaps a danger here of conjuring up a claustrophobic monosocietalism, where everyone is tied and bonded to each other all the time?

Some of it kind of suggests a stuffy kindergarten communism; all of humanity is drawn together in a happy-clappy universalist cult where freedom to separate or diverge has disappeared. Does everyone want to live like that?

In reality both human "association" and "struggle" develop in tandem. As Malatesta admits, although it is struggle with nature and between individuals that first produces association, bigger and more complex human association will produce new levels of struggle.

Different poles of human association will compete and conflict. Meanwhile more mouths need feeding, more food needs producing, and more land is needed for housing, so the conflict with nature reaches a higher critical level.

The more sophisticated and more complex human association becomes the more the individuals are encouraged to develop specialized individual skills and abilities, requiring more separated and developed individual time and space, so they can make their necessary different contributions to society. Even in a post-capitalist environment, students of engineering or medicine, in order to demonstrate their degree of usefulness to community, might individually participate in competitive exams, etc.

There is no clear explanation as to how the mystical millenarian leap takes place from "struggle" and "association" developing in parallel to one big universal solidarity permanently triumphing, and all struggle being totally resolved everywhere all the time.

Neither in a warm-hearted romantic anarchist-communist narrative like Malatesta's, nor in the cold pseudo-scientific narrative of marxist-communism, with its imagined idealised "universal proletariat," is this mystical millenarian leap properly and satisfactorily explained.

Certainly humans have the ability to organise and intervene in their own relations to change the system and substancially reduce conflicts of interest and the harm they can produce.

But can all conflicts and differences and separations and competitions everywhere be permanently resolved by one big unified totalising "solidarity?" Would this even be desirable?

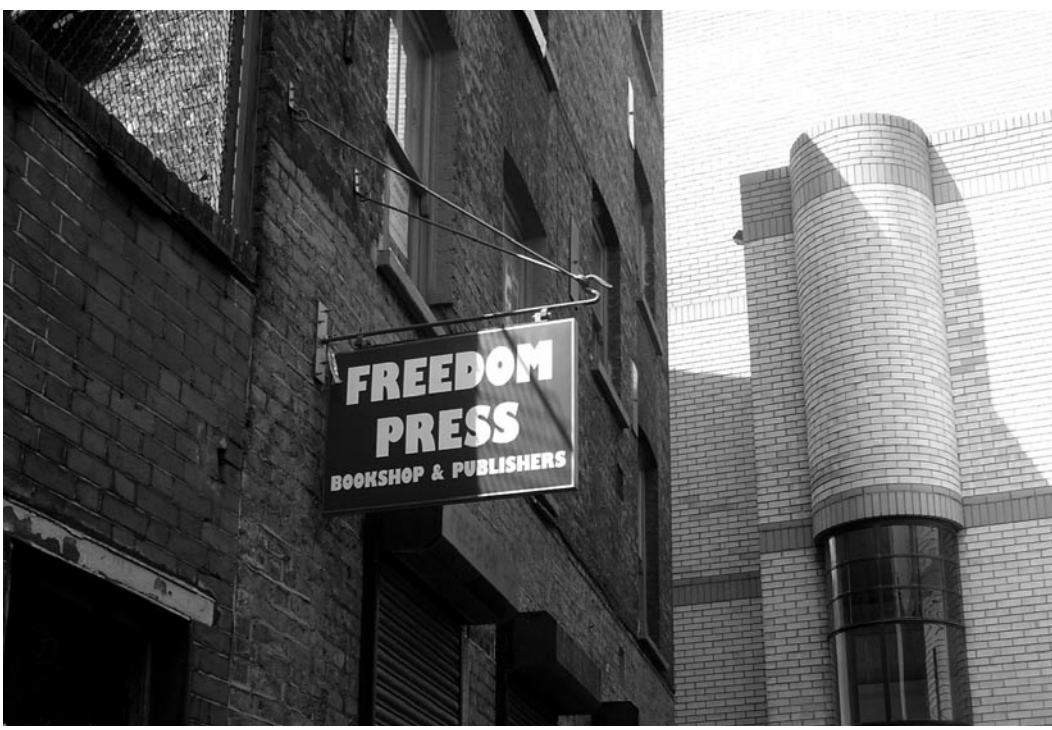
At this point a non-communist anarchist, such as an anarchist mutualist, or a non-communist syndicalist might play devil's advocate and argue that the development of certain degrees of specialisation, separation, dynamic differences, individual semi-autonomy, and even certain forms of workers' property, equal exchange, and friendly competition, can be beneficial to communities.

In chapter five Malatesta rightly counters those state socialists who claim that once private property and the capitalist class are overthrown, government would need to continue as a benign regulator and protector of the interests of society as a whole: "We can answer that in the first place it is not true that once the social conditions are changed the nature and role of government would change.

"Organ and function are inseparable terms… Put an army in a country in which there are neither reasons for, nor fear of, war, civil or external, and it will provoke war or,… it will collapse," and "a government, that is a group of people entrusted with making the laws and empowered to use the collective power to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class…"

What does Malatesta have to say about strategies for overthrowing the system and abolishing government?

Part of the time Malatesta appears to



New issue: Freedom Press has reprinted the classic Malatesta text

demand an instant insurrection with spontaneous informalism; instant revolutionary action to crush those who own social wealth, and put "everything at the disposal of everybody."

He states: "We struggle for anarchy, and for socialism, because we believe that anarchy and socialism must be realised immediately... in the revolutionary act we must drive government away, abolish property and entrust public services... to the spontaneous, free...efforts of all interested parties..."

However, he also expresses caution, and he admits there may be difficulties and drawbacks that will need sorting out. He freely admits: "We do not know whether anarchy and socialism will triumph when the next revolution takes place."

Malatesta's arguments and theories are not quite as simple as they might first appear, and he is aware of some of the problems and contradictions. Under the insurrectionary and revolutionary rhetoric there is also a sense of realism. Over time Malatesta often re-worked his ideas.

As the writer of the introduction of this edition points out, Malatesta argued that anarchism was only one of the forces operating in society and the future would be the result of all the forces at work, not just one of them.

Malatesta asserts that even if the anarchists are defeated in the next revolution, and the parties of compromise triumph, the anarchists' work will not have been useless.

The greater their intransigence in the revolutionary struggle the less property and government there will be in the new society. Malatesta ends Anarchy by proclaiming, "And if today we fall without compromising we can be sure of victory tomorrow."

There is a suggestion here of, rather than one big all-resolving instant insurrection, a series of multi insurrectionary struggles or revolts occurring in waves, each wave winning gains and building strength for the next wave.

So despite the revolutionary rhetoric there is also a hint of a need for an ongoing period of transitional and transformational struggles.

The ongoing anarchist tendency in struggles, which in practise is one tendency among others, encourages a reduction in government and property.

In 1877, Malatesta, together with anarchists Cafiero, Stepniak, and about thirty others, had tried the insurrectionalist approach and started a rural insurrection in the Italian province of Benevento. They succeeded in taking a few villages and burning tax registers.

Their actions were met with some local enthusiasm, but after a few days they were arrested and held for 16 months. After this, Malatesta was effectively hounded into exile for several years.

Later, in 1907, Malatesta took a notable part in the debates at the International Anarchist Congress of Amsterdam concerning the strategy of anarcho-syndicalism, which was growing in popularity among workers at the time.

From a revolutionary anarchist point of view he argued that he was in favour of anarchists being in unions, but at the same time he was critical of those libertarians who thought syndicalism was enough by itself and, as a result, submerged themselves totally in the unions.

The question of how anarchist workers should organise and struggle in an urbanising and industrialising context was not irrelevant to Malatesta, for many years he earned his living by working as an electrician.

Back in Italy, as well as being involved in the general strike and revolts during "Red Week" in 1914, Malatesta was also significantly involved just after the first world war in the workers' factory councils movement.

This suggests he had developed some sympathy with the actions of the councillists in practise because they were in line with his vision of social change.

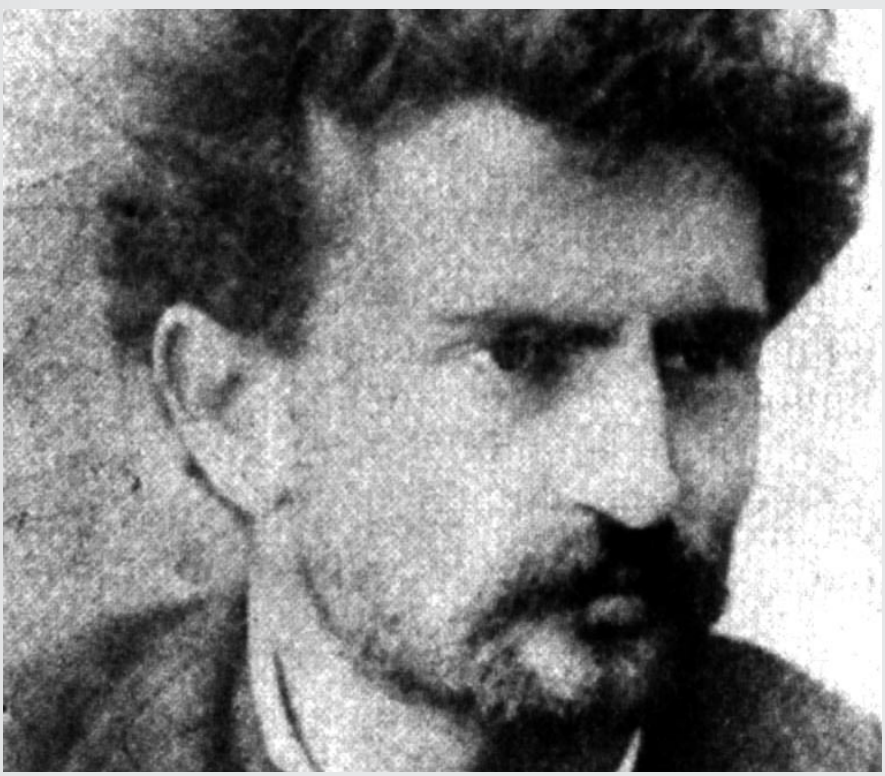
Malatesta regarded his essay Anarchy as the best thing he had ever written.

Unlike previous editions of this text I've seen from Freedom Press, this new edition is produced in convenient "dinky" pocket size, just slightly bigger than a postcard. It comes with a slim spine and is about 60 pages.

The price however is five pounds! Which I think is a bit steep. You might have thought Freedom Press could be a little more socialist with their prices.

By Paul Petard

Factfile: Errico Malatesta (1853-1932)



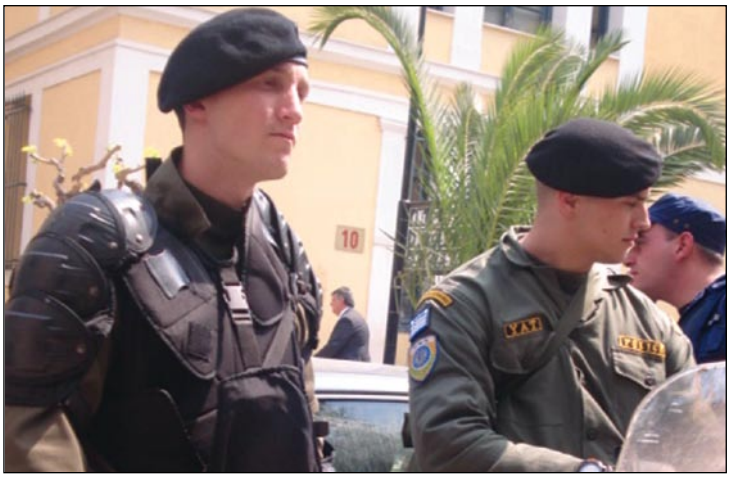
"Not just to kill a king, the man, but to kill all kings – those of the courts, of parliaments and of the factories in the hearts and minds of the people; that is to uproot faith in the principle of authority to which most owe allegiance."

- Aged 14 he faced his first arrest for writing a letter to the king demanding an end to local injustices.
- Radicalised at university, he was expelled aged 18 for demonstrating and joined the International Workingmen's Association that same year.
- Aged 19, he met leading anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, in whose group he would go on to play a major role.
- For the next four years he propagandised for insurrection, was jailed twice and attempted to free the province of Benetento before being arrested.
- Held for 16 months and acquitted, he was kept under constant watch by police, eventually fleeing into exile.
- Travelling, he wound up in Switzerland, befriending Elisee Reclus and Peter Kropotkin.
- In 1880 he moved to London where he helped organise the short-lived anarchist St Imier International.
- Two years later he would fight the British colonials in Egypt, and nursed cholera victims in Naples before fleeing to South America.
- He returned to Nice and London in 1889, spending eight years striking out from Britain to agitate across Europe.
- In the early 1900s he articulated a distrust of trade unionism which has characterised elements of anarchist-communism ever since.
- In 1912 he was jailed for eight months in London and deported to Italy after the First World War ended.
- In 1921, aged 68 he was jailed again by the Italian government, and released just in time to see the fascists gain power.
- He continued to write and agitate until his death in 1932 from pneumonia.

Arrested: Panagiota Rupee, Nikos Maziotis, Konstantinos T, Kristos Kortesis, Efstathios Nikitopoulos and Evangelos Stathopoulos.

High stakes: In April police launched a series of arrests against alleged members of the banned group Revolutionary struggle, picking up six people (above) and releasing warrants for ten more. In response anarchist groups occupied Athens Polytechnic and the headquarters of the national Journalist Union (below right). Tensions were stoked when it was claimed by police that they had linked bullet shells and targets (bottom right and left) to one arrestee which were exposed as being both years old and the wrong caliber. They followed this with an alleged incriminating phone call which was quickly exposed as a lie. Below left, police outside the court in Athens, which saw violence outside when protesters were tear-gassed.

In colour: Making examples



The BIG PICTURE: CND, 1986

FOUNTAIN OF PUNK: It was the year Chernobyl went critical and the Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was holding another march in the centre of London against the folly of nuclear power and bombs.
Although it was nearing the end of its 1980s revival period, CND was still flush from the success of a 1983 march which had seen 3 million people across Europe take to the streets.

Photographer Alan Denning remembers: "It was a hot Sunday for a huge CND demonstration. Reagan was warmongering here in London and protesters sat down in the road, blocking the traffic. These people had climbed onto the fountains in Trafalgar Square – they looked good with their swirling black flags."
Were you one of the people captured by Alan's camera? Tell us more!